SHORT STORIES

EDITED BY C. ARTHUR PEARSON (OF PEARSON'S WEEKLY)

No. 399. FOR WEEK ENDING AUGUST 22ND, 1896. [ONE PENNY.

Worth a Guinea a Box

has passed into a proverb
expressive of universal approval
concerning a medicine of rare value.

This Notable Verdict,

justified by a sale of **6,000,000** boxes yearly,
must secure the confidence of sufferers
in all climes and countries,
and
ever-widening fame
of

BEECHAM'S PILLS

of
ever-widening fame
and
in all climes and countries
must secure the confidence of sufferers,
justified by a sale of **6,000,000** boxes yearly.

This Notable Verdict

concerning a medicine of rare value,
expressive of universal approval,
has passed into a proverb—

Worth a Guinea a Box.

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COUPON.

No. 34

Aug. 22, 1896.

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SHORT STORIES

No. 399.] For the Week ending August 22nd, 1896. [1d.

A STRAY LETTER.

My Louis XV. chiffonier is a very handsome and graceful piece of furniture. It is inlaid and polished with locks of burnished copper, and always seems to be smiling as if its red and white mosaics were merry, rosy lips.

It was given to me by my grandmother, who inherited it from her grandmother, and I verily believe it once stood in a boudoir of the palace of Marly.

Never was an innocent little piece of furniture abused and railed so mercilessly as my chiffonier was when I chanced to think of it one day during my sojourn at the Piraeus, in Greece. You will, no doubt, ask why I thrust my trembling hand through my hair, and cried out: "Miserable idiot!" without stating whether the epithet was applied to myself or to my chiffonier. Good heavens, the only wonder was that I left a single hair on my head! Judge for yourself.

I had been so unfortunate—some time before—as to be loved by the most charming of women. I shall not attempt to describe her, not even by the colour of her hair; it is sufficient to say that for two years I called her "my angel" and "bright image of my dreams." At the end of that period, I allowed one of my friends to say to me, in speaking of her: "How could you be such a fool?" She sent me back my letters, and I neglected to return hers, but put the whole lot in a drawer of my old chiffonier, without thinking to turn the key.

That chiffonier was in my room; my room was in my mother's château; my mother's château was eight hundred leagues away, in the middle of Provence. In setting off unexpectedly on a diplomatic mission I had completely forgotten to destroy those

EDITED BY C. Arthur Pearson

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remains of an attachment which had been delightful—so long as it lasted.

When I accidentally called out the memory of those letters from an obscure corner of my brain, I started up in surprise and shame, for I knew that my thoughtlessness might seriously comprise a woman who had done nothing to deserve such treatment at my hands. I felt that my conduct had been unworthy of a gentleman, and in a fine frenzy I rushed out of the house, inquired for the first steamship bound for Marseilles, took passage, and, listening to nothing but the voice of my conscience, returned to France.

A week later I arrived at the maternal abode, and I will spare you a recital of the ejaculations, the "What, you, George! So soon?" Which greeted me as soon as I appeared. My mother nearly stifled me with her embrace, and was sure that something dreadful had happened to me, and I had great difficulty in reassuring her. When she had grown calm, I said, in an indifferent a tone as possible:

"Will you have my bag sent to my room, mother, dear?"

"Certainly, my son; you must be tired out," she answered. Then, summoning a servant, she said: "Take my son's luggage to the blue room, Pierre."

"You mean the green room," I added.

"No, the blue room," persisted my mother.

"But the green room is my room."

"It was yours once, George," she said smilingly.

"And whose is it now?" I asked in surprise, and my mother pointed to the door, saying merrily:

"Here comes the present occupant."

"Gabrielle!" I cried, going to meet my cousin, the loveliest and most charming of girls, with abundant blonde hair, eyes as blue as heaven, a smile of childish innocence, and teeth like pearls. It was she, of all persons, who was occupying the green room, and who, no doubt, had ransacked the drawers and cupboards.

Unfortunate, thrice unfortunate man that I was!

Gabrielle—gay, artless and confiding, though a trifle shy—gave me her hand demurely, as she said:

"How do you do, Cousin George?"

My face must have betrayed my confusion as I took her hand, and looked searchingly for some sign of dissimulation in her soft eyes. Had she found the letters? Had she read them? To tell the truth, Mme. Blanc had loved me ardently, and had been so imprudent as to express her sentiments in writing, running the gamut of ah's and oh's, with plentiful exclamation points attached thereto. And suppose little Gabrielle had read them—I blushed at the thought.

But, quite calmly, she said: "How do you do, Cousin George?"—that was all; and in my great palm lay a soft, cool, maidenly little hand.

Ah, but what abyss is deeper than a woman's heart, as the Psalmist says; suppose she had read the letters! The only way to make sure was to go into the room and look for them. Gabrielle's room! What sweet melody in the words; yet I felt that I dared not enter that sanctuary, although I had known my cousin since she was a child.

"Come, George, and see how prettily I have arranged your room," she said suddenly.

Joy, bliss, ecstasy filled me as she spoke. I was saved. Innocence had come to the rescue of depravity!

Lightly and gracefully she ran up the staircase. What a pretty figure she had! I followed her like a culprit, feeling almost afraid to go; but yet I must at all hazards get my letters.

My former room was perfectly charming, decked out in blue and white, with no odour of cigars anywhere. The little bed was modestly draped with snowy curtains, which looked like the wings of guardian angels. I looked around anxiously for the old chiffonier. There it stood as usual.

"May I have some water, Cousin Gabrielle? I am dying of thirst," I said.

She took up the *carafe*, but I, artful demon, had already observed that it was empty.

"Wait a minute; I will get you some," she said, and left the room.

I rushed to the chiffonier, and opened the drawer. Horror! it was empty.

The next instant my cousin returned, gave me a glass of water, then showed me her album, and we talked merrily, just as we used to do when we were playfellows.

But where were my letters? Had she found them and hidden them away, or had she burned them? My head seemed to swim as I wondered.

As soon as I could think of a pretext I left Gabrielle, and in the doorway I met my aunt, her mother. She greeted me joyfully, then shook her finger at me in a mysterious way, and in a very knowing whisper said:

"Come with me, you naughty, careless boy." I followed her into her own room, where she opened a drawer, saying meanwhile:

"When we first arrived here, it fortunately occurred to me that before putting a young lady into a bachelor's room it would be well for me to look about it a little. I have had some experience of young men and their ways." Here she put a package into my hand. "Heavens and earth—my letters!"

I threw my arms round my aunt's neck, kissed her rapturously, and confessed everything.

A week passed. One morning, when I got up, I found a tiny piece of paper lying on the floor, as if it had been slipped under my door. I picked it up; it was a letter.

"What does this mean?" I thought, and then I unfolded it and read:

"Dear Cousin,—Why do you not tell mamma all about it?"

"'All about it!' What does she mean? 'Dear Cousin!' It is from Gabrielle!"

I did not understand it at all, and waited anxiously for the breakfast hour. When I heard my cousin go downstairs, I darted out and was going speak to her; but she blushed, turned her face away, and, putting a piece of paper into my hand, said hurriedly:

"Take back your letter, and speak to mamma."

My letter! I rushed out into the garden, and read the missive. Thunder and lightning! it was my writing, my style, my name.

"You are adorable, therefore I adore you. Will you listen to me? Will you let me devote my life to you? A word from you, and I will throw myself at your feet."

It was, indeed, my letter—it was one of my effusions to the ex-queen of my heart. It had slipped out of the package of letters, and Gabrielle, finding it in the chiffonier, thought that I had placed it there for her, and her answer was "Speak to mamma." The result of the accident was, I spoke to "mamma," and I married Gabrielle; I adore her, and am the happiest husband in the world.

Esther Noanes.

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STOLEN! £2,000.

At 3.45 on the afternoon of March 6th, 1887, the paying cashier of the —— bank cashed a cheque for £2,000, drawn by the highly respected firm of Ployd, Gow, and Co., of Fenchurch Street, merchants. It was presented by the manager of the firm.

At 3.55 the manager of Ployd, Gow, and Co. entered the bank and handed in his books and cheques amounting to £5,000. The paying cashier looked up as he heard his voice.

He called someone to take his place and disappeared into the secretary's room, and within twelve minutes the police were at work on the case.

The cheque presented at 3.45 was a forgery, and the man who presented it someone who had made himself up like Mr. Smith of Ployd, Gow, and Co's.

This was not a difficult task. The counterfeit man was the same height as the original and about the same make. Smith had not spoken a hundred words to the cashier during the five years his firm had dealt with the bank.

He always wore a blue serge office coat whatever the weather. He always wore a silk top hat, and it invariably worked its way to the back of his head before he had worn it three minutes.

No one ever saw him at the bank without his gold-rimmed eye-glasses and his tightly rolled umbrella.

Smith had a friendly nod for the patrons he knew in a business way, but he seldom spoke a single word to any one.

Officers were sent to every railway terminus; they searched the hotels and every likely place for a man to try to change his clothes. If the fellow had not some safe hiding place selected in advance the chances were more than ten to one against his making an escape.

In room 5 of Cremane's private and commercial hotel, which I will admit was not a first-class establishment, but still good enough for a traveller earning £5 a week, I read most of the particulars given above in the evening paper. The officials had done their best to keep the whole affair dark until some clue was gained, but the reporters had been too many for them.

I had come in from my round of calls utterly tired out. Reaching my room, I pulled off my boots, lighted a pipe, sat down with my feet on the bed, and this bank business was the first thing which caught my eye as I glanced over the paper. I had just finished the article when the night porter came up.

"Heard about the bank swindle?" he asked, as he entered my room, without the preliminary trouble of tapping.

"Just read it."

"Cool chap, wasn't he? And, I say, there are a couple of detectives downstairs now. They say they've shadowed him here, and they say they're going to search the whole place. They are on the floor below now, and will want to come in here in a minute."

He had scarcely finished speaking when the men appeared. I was a head shorter than Ployd's manager. I was thin, while he was stout, and I was young, while he was middle-aged.

But those two sleuthhounds came in on tip-toe, looked at me out of the corners of their eyes, and sat down on the edge of my two chairs to question me, the bigger of the two taking the precaution to place his seat between me and the door. It was fully a quarter of an hour before they had finished, and then they seemed to take it as a personal injury that I hadn't committed the crime.

Before my visitors left one of them suggested with a wink to his comrade that I might as well be taken along on general principles, as there was no telling what I would not own up to after a week in prison. But the other was not so evil-minded.

In fact, he took a fatherly interest in my welfare and put his hand upon my shoulder pleasantly and compassionately as he advised me it would be better to restore the money while there was yet time. I refused to disgorge, and he went out sorrowing, saying that I had missed a golden opportunity and that I should like to repent and wear a convict's suit.

The hotel was thoroughly searched. Those men did their duty; and I think would have carried off every soul within the place as a suspicious character had not the manager interfered, and the detectives finally withdrew, with at least two pocket-books crammed with notes.

At ten o'clock I was finishing my third pipe and had long before exchanged my paper for a novel. I was just getting sleepy when a queer thing happened.

My bed was in one corner of the room. I sat on a chair on the left-hand side, with my feet across the middle. I had my book on a line with my eyes, and all had been quiet for the last half-hour, when suddenly a voice exclaimed:

"Well, old man, that must be an interesting yarn."

I bounded to my feet and—saw no one. I looked round the room carefully, peering into every corner—no one. I slipped towards the door on tiptoe and opened it with a jerk and saw—no one.

Then I turned, and there was a man standing on the other side of my bed. He wasn't a ghost. He was made of blood, flesh and bones like myself.

To say I was frightened is putting it mildly. I was scared. I sank right into a chair with my mouth open and my eyes bulging out, until my visitor laughed outright.

"Who are you?" I gasped faintly.

"Well, that's a fair question," he replied. "I suppose you've got a right to ask. For the last three hours, up to a minute ago, I was the man under the bed, and now I'm the man on the bed," and suiting the action to the word he lay himself out at full length.

He was a cool hand. I knew human nature well enough to know he had plenty of nerve behind his cheek.

It wasn't all put on. As he lay there I noticed a revolver in his hand. Then I began to understand.

The evening paper had given a portrait of Smith, and I saw that this was his double. It dawned on me all of a sudden that he was the identical chap.

"You were under the bed when I came in?" I queried as we sat looking at each other, and I was wondering how to reach the bell.

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"Exactly," he replied.

"And you heard what the porter said, and the detectives?"

"Every word."

"And, to come to the point, you're the man they want?"

"I am."

"How the dickens did you get here?"

"I didn't choose this abode for its comfort," he said, "nor for its company. I had other plans, in fact. But they miscarried. I dodged into this hotel in search of a temporary asylum, and it looks as if I had found a lunatic asylum. Did you ever see £2,000 in one pile? It's a refreshing sight. See here."

He watched me with piercing eyes, and though he was toying with his revolver carelessly enough, I saw he had his finger on the trigger all the time. He bent over from the bed and picked up a bundle of notes from the floor.

"This means a visit to the tailor's, quail on toast with champagne, a long trip to America or the Continent," and he fondly patted the money. "So they've got an account in the papers, have they? I'd like to read it. Thanks."

He skimmed through the article with evident enjoyment, now and then chuckling to himself. Then he said:

"Pretty close shave that. I'm sorry for the cashier, but suppose he will wriggle out of the responsibility somehow. Excuse my asking the question, but what do you do for a living?"

"I'm a traveller in calicoes."

"Married?"

"No."

"Ever been abroad?"

"No."

"Look here, old chappie," he went on with easy familiarity, as he stretched himself on the bed, "you're giving me shelter and I'll do you a turn. Hand in your resignation and come with me. It will do you good and open your eyes. This little pile will do us first class for a year."

"I'll see you hanged first, you cheeky villain," I shouted. "I'm not making tours with bank thieves and gaol birds. Your trip will end in prison, if it doesn't start there."

"Too peppery, altogether too peppery for the head traveller to a respectable firm," he went on quietly. "And do you think I'll be arrested, as you know so much about it?"

"Certainly. I'm going to take you downstairs and hand you over to the police."

"That's a lie," he said, as he swung his feet off the bed and stood up. "I don't blame you for refusing a trip on the Continent, but please don't make an idiot of yourself in other ways."

"How do you mean?" I asked, also getting up and trying to keep my head.

"Just look at things straight and you'll see. I'm no chicken. Having played for a big stake and won it, I am not likely to let myself be balked by a kid like you. I'm armed, as you see. You're not, so keep your back hair on Even without arms I could do for you, being the larger of the two."

"You cold-blooded scoundrel," I muttered.

"No, don't call names, it's low," he said pleasantly. "Let's consider what is your path of duty. I've got the best of the bank. And how many people have the bank got the best of before? Last year over twenty banks closed their doors in the face of depositors. Every failure was brought about by some kind of fraud. And don't flatter yourself that you owe a duty to the public. The public would let you starve or freeze and not move a finger. You owe a duty to yourself. It is to take change of air. And now's your chance. Preserve the present state of your health, that's my advice, and very good advice, too."

"All of which means," I interrupted, "that you will shoot me if I give the alarm?"

"Precisely."

"Then I shan't do so."

"I thought as much."

He climbed again on to the bed and continued: "I thought I was right when I sized you up. We have now come to an understanding. I've got one or two favours to ask, but I won't keep you long, and I see you want to go to bed. Ah, there are your scissors. I must sacrifice my moustache. Please sit over by the window."

He laid his revolver on the dressing-table and cut off his fine chestnut moustache. I sat watching him and wondered if I had gone out of my mind, or if, perchance, I was dreaming.

"You shave yourself, don't you?" he finally asked, as he turned round and faced me.

I pointed to my razor and strop, and in barely another moment he stood before me clean shaven.

He had sandy hair, while his eyebrows were almost red. There was a bottle of black ink on the table. He dipped his handkerchief into it and painted his eyebrows. With the same fluid he made as neat a black eye as any prize fighter would care to boast, and he was chuckling as he turned to me:

"Just one thing more, old man—a suit of clothes. I must get off this blue serge. Perhaps it will fit you. Your oldest suit, please. I will pay cash for it."

I handed over a much worn suit.

"Rather a tight fit, but it will do," he said. "Here's £5 for it."

"I don't want your dirty money," I said savagely.

"Don't be finicky, it's silly. Now, then, to wrap up the money in a newspaper, and then I'm off. Look here, my boy, take this £100, it will make up for any little inconveniences I have caused you."

"I'd starve first."

"Oh, come now, you're too good for this world. What are you going to do when I leave the room?"

"Kick myself for an ass and then go to bed, most likely."

"Go to bed without the kicking part. You are a very sensible young man, you may take my word for it. If I'm arrested I'll say nothing about what happened here. Ta, ta!"

He reached the doorway and then he turned. "Here's a present for you," he sang out and threw his revolver on the bed. "It's no use to me, I lost my cartridges getting here. Adieu," and then he was gone.

I locked the door and sat down. After a quarter of an hour I slipped into bed. The next morning I awoke with a fearful headache. I went to my dressing-table and there, rolled up in a neat parcel, was the £100.

Did the man get away? Yes; he walked downstairs and out into the street, and the detectives never got a clue of him after that night.

About the money. I returned it to the bank by post, and that part of the business is still worrying the detectives. I could tell them a thing or two, but I won't.

Holly Wilson.

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The Gods Who Guard Tombs

All day long the big siege-guns had battered and boomed round the walls of Tournai. On the plain about the city the French troops marched and counter-marched, throwing up earthworks above ground, while below, the sappers burrowed like restless moles, ever drawing nearer and nearer to the foundations of the besieged city. To and fro across the face of the country scurried the cavalry, raiding farms and granaries, driving before them herds of cattle, and bringing great store of grain into the camp.

Within the town the bright sunshine fell on pallid cheeks and bloodshot eyes. Four long weeks had they withstood behind their walls the terrible onslaught of the French army which was fighting under the very eyes of the most Christian king, Louis XIV. himself. But now they were almost come to an end. Food and water there was little enough of, and already they had stripped the lead from the roofs of churches and burghers' houses alike to make bullets and cannon-shot. From their counter-mines the workmen could hear the steady thumping of the French advance, and above ground the forlorn hopes grew stronger and bolder every day.

That very afternoon the attack had been concentrated on a breach in the southern bastion held by the picked troops of the Royal Auvergnais Regiment. The Frenchmen had scaled the steep escarpment nimble as goats and gained a footing in the breach. For a while the great guns were silent, but a terrible hurly burly of sound took their place. Shrieks and groans; the cheers of the assailants and the answering shouts of the besieged; bugles blowing and church bells jangling a tumultuous alarm sent up into the quiet sky a vast discordant clamour. In the end the attack was repulsed; but the wavering confidence of the townsfolk was mightily shaken.

As night fell the tumult died away, though from time to time a humming in the air and the crash of a projectile among the roofs told of sleepless gunners in the French camp. A vast circle of twinkling camp-fires environed the city, and the warm breath of the soft wind brought to the ears of the watchers on the walls the burden of a soldiers' chorus from the French lines.

Within the city the cabarets were full of lean and hunger-bitten townsmen, and the talk ran all on surrender. Some, indeed, spoke hopefully of speedy succour from the Prince of Orange. But the greater part shook their heads and muttered that their strength to resist was gone.

One man alone kept his house and took council with none. Antoine Nicaise his name was, a wizened man with a stoop and a long, full beard of grey. He lived in the Rue Dambrugge with an only daughter, Anna, to keep house. Some called him an antiquary and a man of learning, but others wagged their heads and said: "Some day the Devil will fly away with him and all his works!" and left him to go his own way..

In a back chamber but scantily furnished yet bestrewn with many books sat Antoine intent upon an ancient volume, straining his eyes in the dim candle-light over the crabbed writing on the open page. The book he read was not printed with type, but laboriously traced by a monkish hand. As he read it, it was plain to see that within him worked a great eagerness: and now and again he broke out aloud with a show of petulance:

"Curse them and their siege! Wherefore can they not yield or repulse the enemy? Here is a great store of wealth lying near to my hand, yet for these rascally Frenchmen must I sit close within these bare walls, and dine scantily off horseflesh and yermin. May a plague lay hold on them!"

On his right lay rule and compasses and a large sheet of parchment on which was traced a plan with intersecting lines carefully measured and set to a scale. To this he would turn from his book and carefully consult, marking here and there little crosses in red ink.

Suddenly the door opened and a slight, fair haired girl entered timidly enough. The old man looked up.

"So, then, thou hast returned, thou naughty child! Where hast thou been gadding about when no honest maid should be astir? I'll warrant thou hast been talking lightly with that wastrel Pierre Gobrecht and forgetting thy old father!"

"Nay, father," returned the maid, her fair skin all ablaze and a tear in each eye, "Pierre is no wastrel, but a sturdy armourer such as all men praise in these days; and I love him!"

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"Armourer!" says he. "Look you, Anna, I will have ye marry no armourers. Let but these sons of Belial, these French fiends be gone with their cannon, and I will find that which will make thee above these burghers, and above the burgomaster himself. Thou shalt wed a duke or a baron and have a castle and many servants and jewels."

"But, father, I want none of these things. I would rather have the love of an honest man like Pierre, than be the proudest lady in the land."

"Peace, girl! leave me to my work!" returned Antoine sourly, and Anna left the chamber with a sore heart.

Now as the night drew on there were rumours of a surrender; and these spread rapidly, and few of the townsfolk slept, but stood at their doorways talking excitedly. At daybreak there came together the burgomaster and the governor and certain of the chief captains who were over the garrison. And these met in the burgomaster's house. But about noon, when the firing should have been at its hottest, a white flag was run up from the principal tower which defended the gate of the city; and when this was seen, the French gunners let be for awhile.

From the big gate issued a little band headed by a herald with a white flag, and so were lost in the French lines. But soon came the tidings that the leaders of both sides had arranged a truce for three days whilst conditions were discussed for the yielding of the city.

On the second morning of the truce Antoine Nicaise rose early and breakfasted before daybreak. When he had finished he took a great empty sack and flung it over his shoulder, and in his hands he carried a pick and shovel. But the parchment map or chart that he had expended so much care upon he thrust into his bosom. And when Anna would have asked him whither he was bound, he answered shortly: "I go to win thee great riches," and so was gone. But Anna was greatly perplexed, and would have stopped him, but that she feared his wrath. So she held herself within doors all day wondering greatly what had taken her father.

Antoine went out with his sack and his tools down to the grand square, passing the church of St. Quentin which was sadly mauled by the cannon-fire of the French. When he came to the great gates he found them open, and a large crush of country folk pouring in with provisions to sell. The antiquary took no note of these but elbowed his way through the clamorous crowd and out into the open plain. Once there, he turned sharply to the right and making a detour arrived at the east corner of the city. From this point there ran a great highway right to Namur, but it did not enter the city, skirting it rather and crossing the border into France. Tradition and the tales of the country folk held that this highway was built by the Romans. Here the French troops had not established themselves, for the city on that side was too strongly defended by nature and art to afford any hope of breaking in. And of passers-by there were none.

Antoine Nicaise dropped his tools and sack from his shoulder. Thrusting his hand within his cloak he pulled out the parchment and examined it carefully. Then he marked a point in the centre of the road and took thirteen strides from it. At the thirteenth he stopped, and, throwing down his cloak to mark the spot, ran to fetch his pick and shovel and sack.

Just there was a little mound such as you may see on many country roads. This the old man attacked with his tools, manifesting an astonishing energy and strength not to be expected from a man of his meagre stature and scanty breadth of shoulder. At first the earth fell away easily before his onset until he had digged a hole deep enough to take him up to the chin. By this time the sun had climbed to the meridian and beat sheer down on the old man's back. Still he toiled on, his face begrimed with sweat and dust from out of which gleamed his deep-set eyes fired with a lurid light of anticipation.

All at once his spade struck upon some hard substance. With a half-muffled cry of glee the antiquary pushed back his long matted hair and in fevered haste cleared away the soil from the spot. Peering down as the sun's rays fell upon the hole, he found a massive stone flooring carefully laid. A shout of exultation burst from his lips. Down on his knees he went, thrusting his long skinny fingers into the cracks, striving to tear up the great stone with his puny nails, till the blood ran out from his finger tips. Then he took his pick, bearing his whole weight and strength upon it to move the stone. But the masonry was stout and heavy; for long it resisted all his efforts. Despite the heat which was now become very great the old man plied his tool upon the interstices with a desperate energy. The perspiration streaming down his visage fell upon his long beard, matting the hair, till he wore the appearance of a maniac.

Yet at last the work was accomplished: the stone moved slowly but surely, until it was levered up and a gaping cavity disclosed. Flinging himself flat upon his stomach Antoine thrust his right arm into the opening and brought it back with something that shone dully in the sunlight. It was a golden vase of ancient workmanship.

For a few moments the old man regarded it in silence, his hand trembling with uncontrolled excitement. Then with a fearful look about him he thrust the vase into his sack, and taking flint and tinder from his wallet kindled a light by whose rays he lowered himself into the cavity.

By the light of his candle Antoine found himself in a narrow cell with walls of solid masonry. About the right hand side ran three stone shelves, one above the other, whereon were ranged various articles. It was from the topmost of these shelves that he had reached the golden urn.

Whether the vessels on the shelves were all of gold the dim illumination of his torch failed to inform him. But opening the mouth of his sack he swept them in, vases, urns, a necklace, and a heap of coins whose falling clink sounded sweet in the antiquary's ears; last of all he laid his hands on a flask which seemed to contain a liquid.

As he pushed the flask into his sack a shadow fell across the ground at his feet. A cold fear seized his heart, turning him deadly sick so that he scarce durst raise his head. From above a voice cried roughly:

"What have we here? Here is some sneaking plot if I mistake not! Henri, Richard, Mortbleu! Hither, lads, and look you on this old mole, sapping with some ill-intent, I'll warrant me."

With shouts and imprecations two or three soldiers leapt down into the hole and dragged the trembling antiquary out. But he had the presence of mind to grasp his sack tightly.

Blinking in the bright afternoon sun and his teeth chattering with fear Antoine Nicaise stood in the midst of a patrol of French musketeers on the dusty road.

"Holy virgin!" exclaimed one who carried a pike and wore a sergeant's stripes, "this is a notorious mummy

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Say now my antique crow-scarer, why dwell ye in a hole in the ground? Art afeared lest the sun's rays should scorch your delicate complexion?"

The soldiers welcomed this sally with a shout of laughter. But Antoine kept his peace, though his knees could scarcely support him. And the sergeant continued:

"Come now, thou blind old mole, cease to wag thy beard and answer my questions or I must convey thee to the provost-marshal. But what is this?" and he laid his hand on the parchment which the rough hauling had caused to project from the old man's robe.

As the soldier's eye fell upon the carefully traced lines and the red crosses marked here and there he knit his brows and exclaimed in a sterner voice:

"This smells of some deep laid scheme. By'r lady I think I have unearthed some plot here. To the king he shall go and that without delay. Henri, Mortbleu, seize the villain and hold him fast. Fall in you others, and quick march to the king."

Down the dusty road tramped the little knot, the sergeant's pike and the muskets and accoutrements of the men spirting little dazzling flashes of reflected light as they moved in order. And in their midst tottered old Antoine, still tightly clutching his sack, his lips working and his eyes strained with fear.

Meanwhile in the silent house in the Rue Dambrugge Anna Nicaise went about her household work with an anxious look, for her heart misgave her whither her father had gone. Not for three long months had he crossed the threshold to go forth, but had kept his room poring over the ancient volumes and measuring out lines on his parchment. As every hour sounded she would go to the door and look out, but only the sunlit empty street met her eyes.

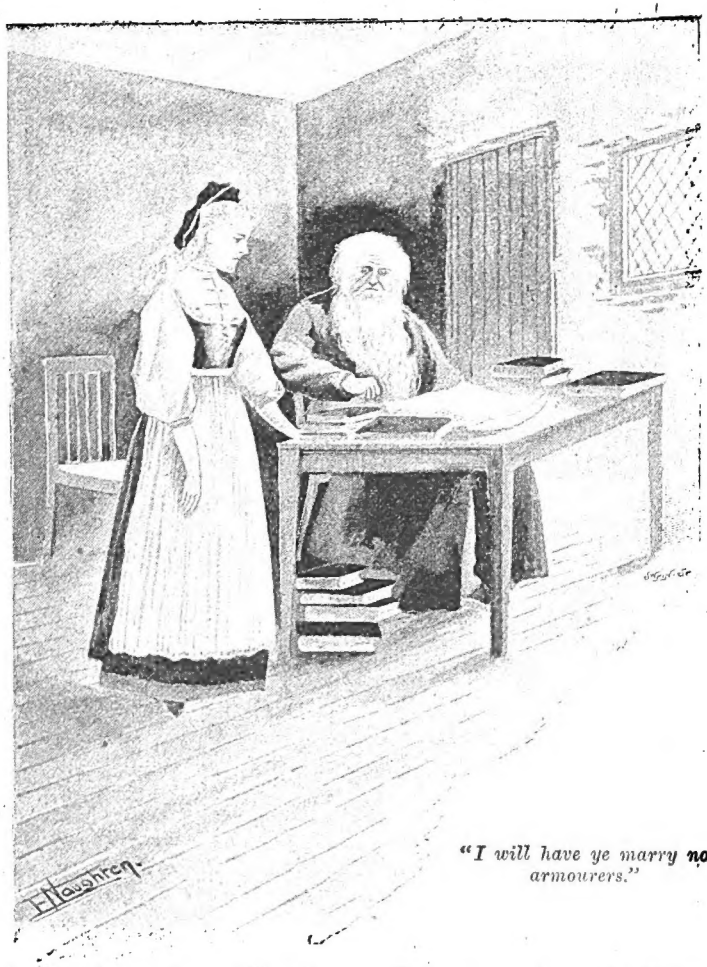
So the afternoon drew on until it might have been five of the clock when the girl heard footsteps sounding in the vacant street. Running to the open door she was met by the tall figure of her lover, Pierre Gobrecht the armourer.

"Oh, Pierre, hast thou heard aught of my father?" she cried, "he went forth at daybreak, I know not whither, nor would he tell me. Now I am sorely afraid some mishap has chanced him." And burying her face in her hands she fell to sobbing bitterly.

"Nay, Anna, never be afeard," said the armourer, clasping her in his arms, "perchance thy father hath lost his way or found an old friend."

"But he never had any friends," protested the girl. "He must have fallen into the hands of the French!"

Now Pierre set about comforting her as lovers have done since the flaming sword barred the way to Eden, and will do till the crack of doom. And presently he said he would go forth and look for the antiquary; and at that nothing would do but that she should accompany him. So the pair went out towards the great gates, and of every wayfarer they inquired if he had seen or heard aught of Antoine Nicaise. But all of them returned the same answer that neither had they laid eyes upon him nor looked to hear of him abroad that was like a hermit. And at each answer after this fashion Anna's heart sank lower, and she had much ado to keep from weeping afresh.



"I will have ye marry no armourers."

But just as they reached the great gates, there encountered them one with a full body and short thick legs who came bustling towards them. He was a shoemaker who lived in the Rue Dambrugge and a gossiping fellow, portentously important in the street, but at home a menial to his spouse. And when he saw Anna he called out upon her and told how he had seen her father hauled off to the French camp by a party of soldiery.

At these sudden tidings the poor girl was like to have swooned, and leant heavily upon Pierre's arm. But shortly recovering she insisted that her companion should lead her with all haste to the French camp to seek her father. And this at first he was loth to do, not caring to expose his betrothed to the jests of the soldiers. But her intreaties prevailed, and they went out through the gate into the wide expanse of the plain.

Now after some minutes they came to the outskirts of the French camp, and despite her anxiety Anna greatly wondered to see the order and strictness of rule which was manifest throughout that great army. Round the

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circuit of the encampment were posted sentries at equal distances, walking to and fro with musket at shoulder. Ever and again a relief guard would be marched down to relieve with due precision and discipline one of the sentinels. On an open space squads of men in bright blue uniforms and white breeches were being drilled, with many hoarse calls from their officer. On the left lay the cavalry lines, long rows of picketed horses champing and whinnying, while on the right were massed together large tumbrils filled with ammunition for the ordnance.

As they passed quickly through the turbid life of the camp Pierre laid his hand on the shoulder of a tall grenadier who was hurrying past:

"I prithee, sir," he exclaimed, "tell me if thou knowest aught of a certain old man whom report says has been taken prisoner this day by a French patrol."

"Ay, that do I," responded the other gruffly. "He whom you seek is but just now brought before the king out yonder," pointing to a large farmhouse that lay some thousand yards away. "You had best go thither. King Louis is fond enough of a fair lass's face!" And he turned such a glance of admiration on Anna as had like to have brought upon him the weight of the armourer's fist. But realising the danger Pierre restrained himself and they hurried on to the farm house.

In front of the door paced a long, thin, lath of a dragoon with an enormous moustache and a mahogany face, a large sabre at the slope over his shoulder. As he walked he clinked his spurs and jangled his scabbard on the ground. At a little distance a group of six of his comrades, the rest of the guard, sat in a row on a seat that ran along the wall, chatting and laughing together.

As Pierre and Anna walked swiftly towards the door with the intention of entering, the big dragoon thrust his long form before them, exclaiming:

"Stand back there in the King's name!"

Then seeing that the armourer pressed forward, though Anna hung back timidly, the trooper brandished his sabre, preparing to strike down the intruder. But Pierre was too quick for him. Bending low he ran swiftly under his guard, grasped him by the waist belt, and with a throw often practised in the playing fields round Tournai on saints' days, hurled the dragoon over his shoulder. With arms and legs wide apart he described spread-eagle fashion a semi-circle in the air, and then striking the ground with considerable force lay still, stunned.

But before Pierre could gain an entrance the other troopers, who had gazed in amazement at their comrade's mishap, flung themselves upon him, and for all his brawny arms and desperate struggles their weight bore him down. Pinning him to the ground they deliberated what they should do with him.

But apparently the noise of the struggle and the girl's shrill cries had penetrated within. For now an officer of high rank came hurrying out and inquired the reason of the tumult.

On seeing him the soldiers let go their hold on Pierre and he stood up, and with him the sentry who had now recovered somewhat, but still rubbed his sore head with a grim look upon the cause of it. So each told his story and Anna added her testimony. The upshot of it was that the officer directed two of the men to lead the prisoner into the building, charging them to guard him straitly, and to bring the girl with him.

At first the difference between the bright sun outside and the dim light of the farmhouse blinded Pierre and Anna. But their eyes growing accustomed to the change, they found themselves in a long chamber with a low ceiling, raftered and coloured a dusky brown by many years of smoke. Round the wainscotted walls were gathered noblemen and officers in gorgeous uniforms and long curling wigs. At the far end of the room on a raised dais sat the Grand Monarque himself, for here it was he held his daily court. He was dressed in a long pale blue coat, a flowered crimson vest, and black silk breeches, a slight figure of a man, not uncomely in countenance, yet with a commanding eye and a regal air. Around him were grouped two princes of royal blood, the High Chamberlain, and the Provost Marshal, Alexandre de Goulard, a harsh, black-visaged man with a huge moustache curling back towards his ears. In a chair set by the king's side Anna saw one whom she thought the

Insisted that her companion should lead her to the French camp.

most beautiful lady she had ever set eyes on. She was of a goodly stature with a finely proportioned figure. But her face and features were of a rare excellence; her eyes black as night and large-orbed, while her raven tresses curled down each side of her countenance, and were pulled back over her shell-like ears. This was the King's "Second Spouse" as she was termed, Madame de Montespan, a woman of great beauty and wit. And at that time her will was paramount with Louis.

Anna had scarce time to discover her father standing over against her between two soldiers when the King spoke:

"How now, my Lord Marquis, who are these malignants who disturb our court assembled here?"

"May it please your Majesty," returned the officer, bowing low. "These are two townspeople of Tournai

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This fellow would have forced an entrance in, and when the sentry forbade him, took him and heaved him over his shoulder. And as to the girl, she will have it that she is the daughter of yon old hermit."

"Is it so, my lord?" returned the King, who appeared in a goodly humour. Then, turning to the armourer: "So then, my young brawler, you would even force your way into the royal presence without a by-your-leave, and when my good fellows hindered, you set about breaking their necks. By my star, madame," he exclaimed to the lady at his side, "but methinks it would serve my turn to have him strung up at once as a warning to turbulent fellows and destroyers of the peace. And as for the damsel," he added, turning to Anna, "I trow you came to assist your companion by turning the heads and breaking the hearts of my lieges with that pretty face." And he stared hard at her, so that she was fain to hang her head.

But Pierre, nothing daunted, spoke out right bravely. "Nay, sire, I had meant no harm to your soldiers. But that saucy knave at the door would not let me pass when I sought to bring this lass to her father, who she heard was in prison."

"Well-a-day," returned the king, smiling somewhat, "stand aside until I have done with this venerable prisoner. Guards, bring forward the old man!"

So Antoine Nicaise was led forth and set in the centre of the room facing the dais, and all eyes were turned upon him. The king questioned the sergeant of the patrol who had taken him, and he told his story, how they had discovered the prisoner digging by the roadside, and on him had found a map in different colours, and how this had smelt to him of plots and mining. When the king had heard this, he turned to Antoine and bade him speak. And the antiquary obeyed, making obeisance to His Majesty.

"May it please you, Sire, but I am no malefactor, neither have I hatched any plot against your Majesty. My name is Antoine Nicaise, and a simple antiquary of Tournai am I, nurtured in poverty. Yet I have ever been a student, and spent years in poring over old volumes. Now it happened in my youth I did some slight service to a monk of the Franciscan Abbey which lies some four miles from the city. He was an aged man, and a student like myself, and when he came to die he sent for me, and," continued Antoine, "if I do not weary your Majesty I will relate how I came to be digging by the roadside."

The king, who appeared greatly interested, signed to him to proceed.

"On his death-bed he sent for me, and when I arrived he motioned me to his side and said:

"'Antoine, I have conceived for thee a great affection, and would requite thee for the service thou didst once render me. As for me, I am a-dying, and riches are no more than the dust of the road. Yet with thee it is different, for thou hast a child to nurture and provide for. Look you in yonder press,' said he, pointing to a corner, 'and take from thence that antique volume. Study that and therein you will find a sure road to wealth.' And with that and a word of farewell he turned his face to the wall and died.

"So I took the book home, Sire, and studied it then at my leisure. It was written in the Roman tongue by the crabbed hand of a monkish copyist, and not facile for weakening eyes to read. Yet at the last I unearthed its secrets. It proved to be an ancient record of the Druids written in the reign of the Emperor Domitian.

"Therein I found it stated, as indeed the peasants tell to this day, that the road at the east of the city was built by the Romans as was their custom when they had conquered a country. For as your Majesty is well aware it was a saying amongst that proud nation 'All roads lead to Rome.' Likewise this book revealed that, as was the wont of the Romans, their rich dead were buried by this roadside, and in their graves were stored with the ashes, jewels and coins of great value. By conning the pages assiduously for several years I constructed a plan which the soldiers who arrested me have taken from me, suspecting it to be some treacherous plot against your Majesty.

"I had no sooner completed this map, marking out the position of the graves by careful measurements, than the French army was directed against the city, and the siege began.

"You may figure to yourself, Sire, the rage and despair with which I watched your lines drawn around our walls, fearing lest some unlucky cannon ball or stray musket-shot might terminate my existence, and bury my secret with me.

"At length there came the time when, reduced by famine and pestilence, the commanders of Tournai flew the flag of truce. As quickly as I might my preparations were made, and to-day at early morn I set forth with pick-axe and shovel, my plan in my bosom, and having gained the road digged there with all diligence till I found the object of my search. And the rest of the tale, Sire, your soldiers have related."

To this long recital King Louis had listened with great attention, and the interest of the tale had taken the whole assembly by the ears. Madame de Montespan leant forward with sparkling eyes and parted lips. The silence was broken by King Louis.

"Antoine Nicaise," said he, "we have heard your tale, nor do we disbelieve it. But it yet remains that you should put the topstone to the structure of your narrative by disclosing to us what you discovered in this old Roman sepulchre. For by all accounts it should prove somewhat entertaining."

"Willingly, your Majesty," returned the antiquary, and with that he pulled apart the mouth of the sack. Diving his arm into its recesses he brought out one after another all those articles that had lain hidden in the grave for so many centuries, and handed them to the King.

First he drew forth an alabaster vase, containing the ashes of the dead Roman. Then came another vase of gold, chased with the loves of gods and goddesses; then three gold rings adorned with precious stones, two gold spurs, the bit of a battle horse inlaid with silver and gold, upon which the rust of many years lay lightly. With these were a seal on which was emblazoned a rough coat of arms, and a necklace of pearls. And at this last the fair eyes of Madame de Montespan grew big with surprise and delight, for the stones were large and choice. But still Antoine brought out fresh spoils from the sack's mouth—a golden stylus and a hundred pieces of gold bearing the effigy of the Emperor Domitian.

"Stay," exclaimed Louis. "If I have read my history aright, and the works of the ancients, there should be an offering of wine to slake the thirst of the toiling ferryman of the Styx. Where is Charon's flask of wine?"

"Nay, but that is here, too," answered the antiquary, drawing forth a crystal flask. "The wine has become quite clear."

"Come, gentlemen," said the king in a merry mood, "who will drink a health to this old Roman lord?" But none of the courtiers seemed eager to pledge the ashes.

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Suddenly Louis uttered an exclamation. He had taken up the alabaster vase, and, having broken the seal thereon, was pouring out the ashes. As he did so, his eye caught upon an inscription on its uptilted surface. Slowly he spelled out the words, till at last the sentence was complete. And thus it ran:

"Dii qui sepulchra custodiunt, poena acerrima afficiant illum qui in hoc mausoleum irrumpat. In vita sua casus resque adversas satis crudeles Aurelius Silvius passus est, in sepulchro saltem placide quiescat."

"*Eh bien*," cried King Louis, looking round. "Who amongst you, gentlemen, will turn that into French for us?" Then, no one offering among the courtiers, he added: "It seems we must e'en translate it for ourself. Thus, methinks it should go: May the Gods who guard tombs punish him who breaks open this mausoleum. The troubles and misfortunes of Aurelius Silvius have been cruel enough during his lifetime; in the tomb at least let him have peace."

As the King recited this in a slow and solemn tone, the more superstitious of those about him shook their heads and whispered to their fellows that they at least would not care to change places with the antiquary. But Louis said:

"Come, now, good sir, you have proved the truth of your story up to the hilt, and as for us you are free. Yet belike you have only exchanged one judge for another yet more potent because unseen. Fear you the curse of these dead ashes?"

Antoine stood up straight smiling scornfully.

"Many thanks do I return to your Majesty for your noble generosity and justice. But for the curse, it troubles me not at all. Ill words break no bones, they say, and I fear a live man's arm worse than the idle threat of a parcel of ashes. But with your Majesty's leave, I would humbly offer Madame this necklace of pearls, which is not unworthy to deck that ivory neck."

But Madame, though her heart greatly desired the necklace, was yet constrained by fear to reject the offer, roundly declaring that she would have no part or lot in breaking into the Roman's tomb.

So the king ordered the guard to release Antoine and his daughter and Pierre, sending them back to Tournai with an escort, for the incident had greatly entertained him, relieving as it did the tedium of camp-life.

On the next day, when the truce expired, the terms of capitulation were agreed upon, and the town was handed over to the French on honourable conditions. But the antiquary journeyed secretly to Antwerp, and there disposed of his treasure to an English merchant, returning well pleased with his bargain. Among the gossips of the town, indeed, when tongues wagged freely, it was confidently reported that he had received the price of one hundred thousand livres. Be that as it may, Antoine Nicaise remained in the old house in the Rue Dambrugge, saying little to his fellows, and sternly forbidding his daughter from any intercourse with her lover. Meanwhile a French garrison was quartered on Tournai, and the citizens, being unmolested, returned to their avocations, and the city resumed its ordinary aspect.

But the return of peace without brought no quiet to the antiquary's mind. A restless desire ever burned in his bones. He could not sleep of nights, but would lie awake, his quickened fancy roaming over the treasures that yet lay hidden in the graves along the roadside. Ever it appeared to him that giant hands, formless but of a terrible intensity, laid hold of him and dragged him forth from the city to the Roman highway. His blood coursed at fever-heat through his veins, and he would be impelled to rise from his bed and lighting a candle sit poring over the parchment until the dawn of day brought sanity to his brain.

Thus the time passed. The blackness of night brought ever an intense longing, a keener thirst for more gold, which the calm light of day could scarcely master. Hazardous it could not but be, since all the country-side knew of his great discovery. Already he dreaded lest the parchment should be stolen from him, and hid it at the bottom of a heavy iron-clamped chest.

Drew himself into a doorway to escape observation.

But at last the visions of the night, these terrible, mysterious impulsions, turned the scale. One night after Anna had retired to her room, Antoine made his preparations softly, and biding impatiently till a half hour after one sallied out into the vacant street. His features had grown gaunter as the desire consumed him, and from beneath his broad-brimmed hat his eyes gleamed like burning coals.

A damp, warm wind met him as he stole down the street, and the overhanging eaves of the houses dripped with moisture. Little pools of rain lay here and there in the unevenness of the way, and blinked beneath the infrequent oil lamps till to Antoine they seemed like twinkling eyes that spied on his every step. Despite the closeness of the air and the thickness of his cloak the old man shivered like one caught with a fit of ague.

This time he avoided the great gates of the city, and

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directed his steps towards a point where a breach had been made by the French cannonade. As he crossed the Place des Armes he heard the tramp of the approaching watchman, and drew himself into a doorway to escape observation. Presently the man appeared, swinging a heavy lantern, and calling as he went: "Two of the clock, Sirs, and a cloudy night."

On sped Antoine noiselessly past the great houses that lifted their walls to the lowering clouds, and whose blank windows stared across the square like the pathetic sightless eyes of a blind beggar. Once he thought he heard stealthy steps at his back treading in time with his own, and turning round sharply caught, as he thought, a dark shadow slipping quickly behind a projecting buttress. With a catch in his breath and a sinking in the pit of his stomach that brought on a deadly feeling of nausea, he compelled himself to retrace his steps, and prove if his eyes had deceived him. Nothing, however, could he find lurking behind the buttress; and, comforting himself with the thought that it was but the silent flight of a night-bird, Antoine resumed his way.

Threading a narrow lane at its further end he came upon the place he sought. Here the ordnance of the French had battered a great gap in the wall, and about the cavity lay strewn in fantastic masses, great heaps of broken masonry, fascines and sacks of earth. Through these the old man groped and blundered, with many imprecations as his shins struck against sharp edges, till at last he passed through the dry moat and out into the open country.

Not a solitary star broke through the blackness which lay like a thick blanket hung low over the plain. But Antoine Nicaise knew the ground well, and, turning sharply to the right, took his bearings by a tall row of poplars, and hurried along over the humid ground.

To his fevered brain the void night was filled with fearful gigantic shapes, that crowded round him, urging him to quicken his pace. All at once to his strained ears came a sharp sound, like the rattling of a displaced stone a hundred yards behind. This time he dare not turn back; a panic terror took him by the heels, and for all the weight of the tools onhis shoulder and his heavy cloak, he hurled himself headlong forward, splashing through mire and puddles, till at length he gained the goal he sought for.

But here another difficulty met him. In the lack of light one portion of the high-road was so like another that it seemed as if the antiquary's journey should end in vain. But Antoine was not to be baffled. Casting all fears to the winds as the gold hunger gripped him more fiercely, he took a lantern from his sack, and by the aid of steel and tinder, lighted the candle. Then, pacing up and down some two hundred yards either way, the lantern revealed a familiar clump of bushes that stood in his mind's eye as a landmark. The rest was easily done. By the candle-rays he consulted his map, measured out the distances, and in the end hit upon the exact point.

A gloomy dawn found him deep in a cavity of his own making, and ere the bells in the city towers and steeples sounded the hour of eight Antoine had forced his way into the second mausoleum, and stood surveying its contents with the aid of his lantern.

On a sudden a pebble dislodged from above came rattling down at his feet. Another followed, striking him upon the head. Startled, he dropped his lantern on the ground and looked up. Over the edge of the aperture appeared three faces, and at the sight of them Antoine Nicaise felt his time had come. Three evil faces were they; the first, a long, lantern-jawed, cadaverous visage with deep-sunk, malevolent eyes; the second, covered with a red bristling moustache and beard, with a purple scar running obliquely across the forehead; and the last pouch-cheeked, double-jowled, with features contorted in a horrrible grin.

The old man's knees rapped together. At his feet the candle in the overturned lantern flared and flickered as the wax melted. A frenzied terror shook him, his ears were filled with a great roaring, and before his eyes in lurid red letters stood out the words: "May the Gods who guard tombs punish him who breaks open this mausoleum."

He tried with all his force to cry out. But as his mouth opened the keen point of a dagger hurled deftly from above took him in the throat, and he fell forward on his face, clawing convulsively at the ground.

"Curse me," ejaculated the rotund robber, as they filled in the grave after they had emptied it of the spoil. "This antiquary was surely a man of forethought thus to dig his own sepulchre. He hath saved us thereby much trouble and no little expense in sexton's dues."

So Antoine Nicaise was seen no more in Tournai. And when the rumour of his disappearance spread abroad folks shook their heads and whispered mysteriously. So that to this day they will tell you in the city how the Devil flew away with the antiquary.

ARTHUR PAGE.

Post-Card Competition.—No. 8.

WHAT word in this issue, over five letters in length, contains the *greatest proportion* of elongated letters (p's, b's, t's, y's, etc.)? A guinea is offered to the reader living within 100 miles of London who first points this out, and another guinea to the reader living beyond this distance. *Post-cards only, please.* Other forms of communication will be disqualified

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BY MERE CHANCE.

With a gesture of annoyance, he flung his pen upon the table.

"It is useless! I shall never succeed in describing this scene until I have actually experienced it," he said to himself.

An ordinary, common or garden writer of short stories would never have taken the matter so to heart. But he, Paulus Frank, the apostle of realism, could never allow a story with description in it that was not true to life go into the ruthless hands of the critics.

The plot of his novel was certainly simple enough. Two jealous, spiteful women had entered into a plot against the noble, innocent heroine of the tale.

By every possible means they sought to destroy her position in the eyes of her husband, and those of the world. They finally agreed upon the plan of sending an anonymous letter to her husband, wherein they accused the wife of faithlessness.

Paulus Frank cultivated close relations with a man whom he had selected as the model for this hero, and often invited him for that reason to his house.

He had just reached the point where he had to describe how this man, who was naturally cold blooded, stands before his wife with a deadly pallor on his face and confronts her with the letter, threatening to shoot her unless she makes a frank confession of the whole transaction.

And it was just this scene that Paulus Frank felt himself powerless to describe.

Would the wife defend herself with the vigour and spirit against such an attack, or would she merely allow herself a contemptuous little laugh when brought face to face with the calumny?

Would her insulted and innocent heart rise in indignant protest against such a gross accusation, or would she merely let the matter drift on and make no further explanation than a quiet denial?

What expression would her face wear? Would she turn deadly pale or wear the flush of shame? Would her hands pluck nervously at her little handkerchief, or would she stand motionless and erect before him as if turned into stone under his very eyes?

And the answer to all these questions he did not find readily in his mind. Inspiration had left him in the lurch. Twenty times and more he strove to put on the paper the powerful scene which was to be the climax of his story.

But it was in vain, for success did not shine upon him, and he became more and more certain that he would only be able to portray the scene with justice and power when he had actually been through it himself, and felt every phase of emotion recorded in lines of fire on his heart.

Once this peculiar thought had taken possession of him, he was unable to rest until he saw it realised.

It came to him one morning with such force that he let his fist fall upon the table with a bang that almost shattered the glasses.

"Have you gone crazy?" cried his pretty young wife, raising her clear blue eyes to his face. "What's the matter? Ever since you began that wretched novel of yours you seem to be quite a different man."

And as he only stared at her and made no answer, she went on to reproach him soundly for his conduct.

"It cannot continue like this," she concluded. "It must stop before long," and then buried herself again in her work.

At the same moment the servant appeared on the scene with the announcement that the doctor was at the door.

A young man entered and greeted the husband and wife with the familiarity of an old acquaintance. Frank returned his greeting, then looked vacantly before him, and appeared to interest himself deeply in the pattern of the tablecloth.

Shortly after Frank went to his study with pleasure written all over his face. At length he seemed to have found a way out of his difficulty. He wavered, however, undecided for a little while. But why not? What harm was there?

Besides it was not possible in any other way. He would be obliged to write a plain, accusatory letter to his wife, but then he would confess it all afterwards and ask her forgiveness.

Thus there could be no further harm attaching to his plan, and he would be freed of all difficulty and be able to describe the scene with powerful realism.

He could not understand why the idea had not occurred to him sooner. It was so simple and so natural, and there seemed to be absolutely no other escape from his difficulty.

Thank goodness the time was now approaching when

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he would be able to hear the bitter protest of the innocent and calumniated wife.

Forthwith he was anxious to execute his design, but his heart beat a little faster at the thought of it. With difficulty he wrote a few lines in an altered handwriting, which interpreted in a pitiable way the accusation of the wife whom he adored and loved. And, in order to make the deception more complete, he added thereto the initials of the name of her supposed lover and traducer.

For this purpose he selected the name of the young doctor who had only a few minutes before come to his house on a visit.

"It is true, I know, that my wife cannot endure him," he said to himself, "but what of that? The scene will be all the more natural and powerful."

Yet somehow as he wrote the address on the envelope —his own address—a sad feeling stole over him.

"Some things cause pain, even in a joke," he murmured to himself. "How thankful I am for my wife's stainless character!"

And with trembling fingers he finished the writing. Then he weighed carefully in his mind what the next step should be and finally carried it to the post-office himself.

All was going splendidly. In the evening they intended to go to the theatre, so that she would find this letter, on which so much depended, among her other papers and letters when they got home again. The whole scene would be acted at night just as in a real novel. It was splendid.

When they came out of the theatre it was already late.

"After midnight," remarked Frank as they passed the tall clock in the hall.

He asked the maidservant who opened the door for them if there were any letters, and she gave him those that had come while they had been at the theatre.

While his wife sank with a tired sigh into an arm-chair and untied her veil he remained standing and ran his eye over the addresses.

Suddenly something seemed to strike him. He raised his eyebrows slightly, and casting a stern glance in the direction of his wife tucked the correspondence under his arm, bade her good-night, and went abruptly into his study.

The young wife observed him narrowly, drew a deep breath as her custom was, and shook her head. She did not ask him whether there were any letters for her among his own, and he, of course, did not tell her.

Then she took her candle from the servant girl, and walked slowly towards her bedroom.

Once in his workroom, Frank indulged in a contented little laugh. At last the goal was in sight. In a few moments he would know all he wanted to know! Yes, all, and he laughed again. Then it would be easy for him to describe the scene from beginning to end in a masterly manner.

Just a little more patience, and her maid will have left her. Going up and down in his room, he calculates what effect will be produced on the world by his novel, drawn in the most realistic manner from Nature itself.

"I wonder what makes her so slow to-night?" he said to himself.

In the stillness of the night he could hear the sounds of their voices. Then he heard her lay down her rings on the marble slab of the dressing-table. Thereupon the clear sounds of her merry laughter floated through the air to his ears.

"To-day of all days, she seems to take so long," he murmured to himself.

A little while longer he walked up and down the room with excited brain. Then he heard the opening and shutting of the door and steps dying away in the distance.

"At last!" he exclaimed with a sigh.

Softly and with great caution he pressed the door handle, walked lightly through the dressing-room into the bedroom, and entered with such suddenness and violence that the young wife cried aloud with fear and astonishment.

"How you frightened me! Have you gone crazy?"

He made no answer, but stood in silence, watching carefully every gesture that she made and every change of expression that crossed her face.

Then in measured steps and with a pale, earnest face he approached her.

The fair young wife sat upright in bed.

The night candle burnt brightly on the table beside her.

With trembling, feverish hands he held out the terrible letter to her.

"There! Read that!" he cried in an angry, pained tone of the outraged, injured husband.

The woman turned suddenly to a deathly pallor. She seized the letter hastily and cast a rapid glance over it.

For a moment she raised her eyes to her husband's face, but only for a moment, for she immediately again read over the letter that she held in her trembling hand.

"I know all," he added quietly, watching every movement she made. "I know it all," he repeated louder and in sullen anger.

She made no reply. Her mouth twitched nervously, her eyelids dropped, and with a wild cry of hysterical anguish she slipped out of the bed and flung herself at his feet. The amazed husband looked on with a dull sensation of horror in his heart, while she clung to his knees, and with an agonised voice groaned out:

"Forgive me! Forgive me!" JESSIE BOYD.

RESULT OF NO. 5

Jumbled Story Competition.

(See page 250.)

A good number of competitors in this competition came very near putting the story together correctly, but a certain proportion failed to strictly comply with the conditions. Some *wrote* the title or the author's name, some omitted stops, some pasted on the lines so feebly that they came off before the paper reached the checkers, while a few neglected to put their names on their attempts. Altogether, thirty-four competitors were absolutely correct. We have added a few shillings to the £10, with the result that each winner receives 6s. as a share of the prize. Names of the winners appear below:

Mrs. Horsfield, Ipswich; Miss H. Pearson, Ashton-under-Lyne; Mrs. Farrant, Canterbury; C. Sewell, Greenhithe, Kent; Miss Wiesner, Glasgow; Miss L. Vanbegan, London; A. Douglas, Greenock; Miss L. Reader, Islington; F. Heard, Leytonstone; H. Biggs, London; J. Sangster, Hull; A. Padmore, Bristol; T. Hess, Liverpool; Mrs. Harrison, Putney; E. Carter, Gospel Oak; A. C. Dalgetty, Macclesfield; Mr. W. H Bonham, Dublin; Mr. F. May, London; Jno. Eccles, Hoylake; Mrs. Bleakston, Sunderland; Mrs. Ivor, Midlothian; Miss P. Mitchell, Gateshead-on-Lyne; Miss Shipstone, Hornsey; A. Budgen, Dorset; Corporal Wm. E. Barrett, Omagh; Miss F. H. Eachus, Enfield; Miss M. Burgess, St. John's Wood; W. Glenny, West Dulwich; W. B. Hand, London; J. B. Crane, Peckham; Miss Bert Allen, Chiswick; E. Scanes, West Kensington; Miss Barry, Ipswich; Mdme. M. Sydney, London.

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A Romance of the American War.

It was in the year 1862. We were lying before Richmond, and McChellan was waiting for orders, which, alas! never came, to move on to the Confederate capital and put a speedy termination to the war.

Our Colonel was a noble specimen of a Virginian gentleman, who had at the outbreak of the struggle espoused the cause of the North, in opposition to the wishes of his wife and relatives.

His patriotism brought about a separation from his family.

His wife and her daughter, a young girl of sixteen years, went to live with his father-in-law, who was an ardent Confederate, while the Colonel joined the Union troops at Washington.

This much of his history we knew, and it accounted for his almost gloomy demeanour.

It was evident that he loved his wife and child, and though he had given them up at his country's call, yet the separation was hard to bear.

Still, not a murmur passed his lips, and he was respected and loved by the regiment who acknowledged him as their leader.

I was at the time a captain, commanding a detachment under him, and one evening he sent me word to come to his headquarters.

"Captain," he said to me as I entered, "I have just received a communication from General McChellan himself, that the enemy have obtained secret information of the movements of the very division I command. There must be spies in the camp. This thing must be stopped. My honour and fidelity to my country are brought into suspicion thereby. I commission you to ferret out who it is that betrays us, and no mercy shall be shown him."

"Colonel Thornton," replied I, "my suspicions have been awakened in the same direction."

"Ah," exclaimed he, "whom do you suspect?"

"Some time ago," continued I, "we had a young drummer boy among us. The other day he was brought into the camp a corpse. The men had found him dead in the woods. His face was shattered by a ball beyond all recognition, and he was only known to be our drummer boy by the clothes he wore. A sheet was wrapped round the corpse, and it was interred. Just as the body was being lowered into the grave, the sheet slightly fell away from his head, and I saw that the hair was black. At that time it did not strike me, but afterwards I remembered that our drummer boy had flaxen hair. Since then I cannot help suspecting that that boy was a spy, and that he had used this stratagem to escape from the camp unnoticed."

"You say he was only a boy?"

"Yes, a lad about sixteen years old."

"I believe your suspicions are right. When did this occur?" said the Colonel.

"Yesterday morning."

"No doubt the boy has obtained all the information possible, and is now on his way to join the Rebel Army."

"If he is," said I, "he can still be captured. The Confederates are over two days' journey off. The boy is no doubt skulking through the woods, and the recent rains have made the way almost impassable to one on foot. If I set out at once with a detachment on horseback I think I can overtake him."

To this the Colonel agreed, and less than fifteen minutes later I started at the head of six men on my expedition.

We scoured through the woods during the whole night, and as we were well mounted we travelled a considerable distance.

Just at daybreak the next morning a cry of one of our men drew us up before a clump of bushes.

There, on the grassy mead which carpeted the earth, lay stretched in a deep sleep a young girl.

Her dress was torn and bespattered with mud, her arms and hands were scratched by the briars through which she had passed.

Yes, she was very beautiful, and as I peered into her face, I was struck with the resemblance she bore to the drummer boy for whom we were searching.

Yes, there was the same fair countenance, the florid complexion, the flaxen hair, now loosened from its restraint and extending in a mass over her head and shoulders.

My heart throbbed violently as I thought that the drummer boy might have been a girl in disguise, that the sleeper was a girl spy.

To satisfy my mind I alighted from my horse and bent closely over her. Fatigue and exhaustion had rendered her sleep so profound that I did not awaken her.

I drew forth a package of papers from her pocket.

They were addressed to a noted Confederate general.

I broke the seal and read the contents.

There was a full description of our numerical strength, our plans and future movements.

There was no doubt.

The beautiful sleeper was a girl spy.

"Men," said I, and my voice slightly trembled, "do your duty."

With averted countenances several of my men approached and wakened her.

"Oh, I am lost! I am lost!" cried she, sinking to the ground.

"Handcuff her," ordered I, "and place her on a horse."

"Ah," shouted she, "whither will you bring me?"

"To the Colonel," said I.

"Oh, no, no," begged she, turning as pale as death, "do not bring me to him. Kill me here. I fear not death. I beg not for life. Only kill me, kill me on this spot."

Her pleading was, however, in vain. I could but order my men to proceed as I had directed. She now began to struggle and scream. It was with the greatest difficulty that she was bound and put on horseback.

It was late in the afternoon when we arrived in camp.

I immediately proceeded to the headquarters of the Colonel.

"Well," asked he, as I entered; "have you succeeded?"

"I have," replied I, "the spy is caught."

"Caught?"

"Yes. Only it seems that the drummer boy was but a disguise. The spy is a girl."

"A girl!" exclaimed he in surprise.

"Yes, here she is."

My men at that moment dragged in the struggling captive.

Freeing herself from her captors, she rushed towards the Colonel, and kneeling in the dust before him, exclaimed:

"Father!"

"Ida—my daughter!" shrieked he in such a tone of anguish that it pierced the very souls of those who heard it.

It was midnight when the court-martial adjourned.

The Colonel had not taken part in the council, and I was commissioned to inform him of the result of their deliberations.

I found the Colonel sitting at his desk reading a Bible.

He seemed unnaturally calm.

"Well?" asked he eagerly. "They have found her guilty?"

I could only nod.

"Oh, Heaven!" he cried, momentarily overcome.

"They have found her guilty," said I, "but they have not sentenced her. They know how much you love your daughter, and they have left it to you to decide her fate. You can doom her to death; you can set her free. Oh, sir, let me beg for your daughter's life. Let her live. A father's love will be a sufficient reason for this act of clemency in the eyes of all the world."

He paced up and down the room with agitated steps.

I anxiously waited for him to speak.

At last he turned to me and abruptly said:

"Bring her to me, and be present to await further orders."

I departed, and a moment later returned with the beautiful girl.

With slow steps and eyes bent to the ground, she advanced until she stood before her father.

He gazed at her for a moment, and then turned away to hide the tears that sprang to his eyes.

"I must be firm, I must be firm," he muttered.

Gradually he became calm, and, gazing full at her, said, in a voice that betrayed not the slightest sign of passion:

"Ida, you were the light of my days, the hope of my existence. I thought to behold you the happy wife of a worthy man. But now all that is passed. You have chosen not only to betray your country, but your father."

"No, no," she cried wildly; "not my father, not you. My grandfather pictured to me how glorious would be the service I could perform for the South. Everyone around us was ready to die for the cause. I felt the inspiration; I became a spy. When I was sent to this division I knew you were its leader. It is true I obtained the information they desired of me. I carried the messages with me when I was captured. It was my intention to surrender them up only on the condition that whatever would happen your life should be saved."

"I care but little what becomes of me," replied he sternly, "it is the betrayal of your country that demands your punishment."

"And that is?" gasped she.

"Death!"

The next morning was sad and dreary.

The drizzling rain fell from the dull, leaden clouds.

All nature seemed to weep at the mournful spectacle about to be enacted.

The Colonel was calm and stern.

Not a sign of the tumult within his breast was visible in his almost impassive countenance.

"Lead forth your prisoner," said he to me in icy tones.

I left his presence, and soon returned with horror depicted on my visage.

"Oh, sir," cried I, kneeling before him, "she is dead!"

"Ah, dead!" exclaimed he.

"Yes," continued I, "she lies cold and inanimate in her cell. She has poisoned herself, for I found this phial in her hand. See, it is marked 'poison.'"

"Heaven's will be done," ejaculated he.

"Sir," cried I, "she is now dead. You have kept your faith to your country. Will you allow us to prepare for an interment worthy of the daughter of our commander?"

"Do with her as you may," sighed he, sinking gloomily into a chair.

I left him thus to make the necessary arrangements for the funeral.

It was a grand affair, but the father did not attend it.

* * * * *

Three years passed away, and the war was over.

Colonel Thornton had been raised to the rank of general, and I to that of colonel.

We were in Washington, and I sent the General a courteous invitation to my approaching marriage.

He arrived quite late, and the guests were already assembled in the magnificent hall.

Not without a tremor I led my beautiful bride up to him.

She raised her veil, and, kneeling before him, softly murmured:

"Father!"

He staggered back, grew pale, and seemed to be struggling with a violent emotion.

Then stretching forth his arms he clasped her to his breast, and, whilst tears coursed down his furrowed cheeks, exclaimed:

"Alive, my Ida, alive. Oh, Heaven be praised!"

An explanation, of course, followed.

I confessed that I had induced the girl spy to counterfeit death as the only means by which she could save her life and her father's honour.

The funeral had been but a sham, and the girl spy was secretly conveyed to her friends.

I dare not reveal the secret while the war lasted, and the company was equally bound to silence.

When, however, peace and harmony had been restored to the country, I sought her whose life I had saved, and, wooing, won her.

The General, in the fulness of his joy, forgave the ruse, and his happiness was made complete by a reconciliation with his wife, who was also present.

Years have passed since then, and when I behold the beaming countenance of General Thornton, my father-in-law, I thank Heaven that it was permitted to me to save the life of the "Girl Spy."

FRANCIS J. PALMER

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PAUPER BLUE BLOOD

BY WINIFRED GRAHAM.

Author of "When the Birds Begin to Sing," "Through the Valley," "Six First-class Passengers," etc., etc.

CHARACTERS.

SEFTON RAVENSCROFT.—Son of the late Sir Reginald Ravenscroft and a pauper, owing to his father's failure.
GEORGINA PLUFF.—A governess in the family until Sir Reginald's death, when she intimidates Sefton into marrying her.
JOHN PLUFF.—A wealthy retired grocer, and cousin to Georgina Pluff (Lady Ravenscroft). In return for attendance at his dinners and At Homes, he supplies her with money.
MRS. RATHBONE.—A widow of whom John Pluff is rather fond, to the disgust of Georgina, who anticipates becoming his sole heiress.
LADY NORAH CANNINGTON.—In love with Sefton but who is compelled by her father to break off the engagement, owing to the former's poverty, and marry the Duke of Malvern.

CHAPTER XVI.

MAKING THE RUNNING.

THE baby was six weeks old, and Georgina had been quarrelling with her husband on the subject of god-parents.

"Of course, Pluff will have to be one," she declared, "that goes without saying."

"I wish you would not say 'Pluff.' You have only taken to that expression lately. Can't you give him a 'cousin' or a 'Mr.' occasionally?"

"I've picked it up from Mrs. Humphery's letters; our long correspondence has made us so very intimate, and she always speaks of John as 'Pluff,' now. Perhaps it does sound rather masculine."

"Any how, I would rather he was not asked to be godfather."

"And why not, in the name of goodness?" cried Georgina shrilly.

"Well, it might be awkward for the poor little beggar when he grows up. John Pluff will take a sort of parental interest in him which he may not quite appreciate when he's old enough to understand."

Georgina looked at her husband solemnly.

"Sefton, I really did not give you credit for being such a fool. I hope you don't intend training the boy to be stuck up and rude to his mother's relation."

"I don't wish to argue about it, but we've had enough of John Pluff. I'm not going to have a grocer for my son's godfather."

"Grocer, indeed! He left the business four years ago. Besides, you seem to forget a boy requires two godfathers. I mean mine to have money for use, and name for swagger. I shall therefore ask my cousin and your uncle, Lord Macphairson."

The words startled as well as angered Sefton. He brought his fist down on the table with a thud.

"That you shall never do! Have you no sense of decency, no proper pride, no fine feelings to know when you are snubbed? He never approved of our marriage, and on hearing of it wrote my mother a very hot letter, which, out of consideration, I refrained from showing you, though you richly deserved to read it. Since then he has utterly ignored our existence, and you would so far lower yourself to ask a favour of him."

"You exaggerate everything, Sefton. Because the old idiot was crotchety at first, that is no reason why he should not have calmed down by degrees, and be ready to take the olive branch I am about to hold out. Now that I have done the right thing, and presented his sister's son with an heir to the estate, he may look more leniently upon me. I will humour you so far: *if* Lord Macphairson consents I'll let you off John Pluff. A little buttering note to him saying the swells offered, and we could not refuse them, though *I* was bitterly disappointed, etc., will put it all right. Then you can ask your beloved Mr. Shirling, and," with a sneer, "the Duchess of Malvern to stand as godmother!"

Sefton gave Georgina a look she did not forget for the rest of the day. She could not think what it reminded her of, but remembered eventually she had seen something like it upon one of the waxen murderers in the Chamber of Horrors.

"Write," he muttered, "and see what you will get from Lord Macphairson!"

A mocking laugh was his only reply as he left Georgina.

"You think you know a great deal," she said when he was well out of earshot. "But I can write a fascinating letter when I please, and I fancy I shall succeed in 'fetching' Uncle M."

"That you shall never do!"

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So she indited a pathetic little epistle, with a good deal of unnecessary gush towards the finish. Had she known where to stop she might have gained the day.

Lord Macpharison hated humbug, and no small quantity of scandal had reached his ears concerning his nephew's wife at the time of Sir Reginald's death.

He answered Lady Ravenscroft by return. The letter was handed her at dinner. She waited before opening it till the servant left the room; then she did so slowly, and without looking at her husband. He, however, watched her face curiously, guessing the refusal from the vexed twitching of her eyebrows. She set her lips, breathing fiercely through her nostrils; then she folded it again without a word, still keeping her eyes averted.

"I should like to see the letter," he said at last.

Hot, petulant tears of offended dignity were forcing their scalding drops to the surface of Georgina's vision; she dared hardly trust herself to speak. She could not cope with Lord Macpharison's reply; it was too clever—and too true.

Tearing the sheet into atoms, with the fierce gestures of one who destroys a mortal foe, she crumbled the scattered pieces in her hand and flung them across to Sefton, saying: "Take the letter, and read it, if you like!"

He watched her sail from the room with the air of a tragedy queen, her head aloft, her eyes flashing; but for once it was not acting. The dramatic hand of Nature had asserted itself, and given a strange majesty to Georgina's bearing.

The scene quickened Sefton's sluggish blood; he felt like an actor in a drama, forgetting for the moment that he was himself. Following Georgina stealthily, he tracked her to the shrubbery. The red blossoms had long since died and been cut down, but she knew the spot, and it was thither she wended her way.

"Reginald," she whispered, "come to me; come, if you can, I adjure you, in the name of our love!"

She stood with her face turned up to the sky.

Two strong arms gripped her suddenly; hot, mad kisses fell upon her ashen cheek—kisses she had not felt for an eternity, kisses that had come from no lips but those that were long dead.

She dared not move; but a scream, half joyful, yet thrilling with agonised terror, broke from her. As it did so, the man thrust her away. He remembered she was Georgina.

His wife looked at him wonderingly, still trembling from the shock.

"See," she said, "how long it is since you held me in your arms. I did not know you; I was afraid."

A nervous laugh broke from Sefton.

"I beg your pardon," he replied. "For the moment I thought I was my father."

She stared at him, her fingers strained through her hair, dishevelled from his caress.

"*What do you mean?*"

There was a horrified vibration in her tone.

Sir Sefton could not explain.

"Come in," he said; "these September nights are cold." She followed him without a word, still perplexed and somewhat dazed.

"You look tired. Go to bed, Georgina. I shall smoke in the study."

He walked away. She heard him lock the door.

"What *did* it mean?" he asked himself—"that wild fever of hate or love?" He felt as if he were stabbing her with every kiss, yet it gave him momentary, inexplicable delight.

"I suppose it's the same old riddle," he said, lighting a cigarette. "The mystery of sex!"

She stared at him, her fingers strained through her hair

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An apparition in pale blue greeted Georgina's astonished eyes.

Until the end of July Georgina had received constant letters from Mrs. Humphery, detailing Mr. Pluff's movements. He was seen driving daily with Mrs. Rathbone in the Park, and not only that, they had also appeared at theatres together and other places of amusement.

Then London became deserted, and the thread snapped. John Pluff drifted seawards, wrote frequently to Lady Ravenscroft, but never mentioned Mrs. Rathbone. For all his cousin knew, he might have married the widow secretly. The dread of this possible *dénouement* troubled Georgina sadly.

But now that she had carried her point and John Pluff was expected for the christening, her fears were lulled. At least, he would be free from Mrs. Rathbone at Ravenscroft Park!

Georgina, however, reckoned without her host. For the day after John Reginald had received his name at the font, her nerves experienced one of the severest shocks she had ever suffered through Mr. Pluff.

They were walking together, she and Cousin John, talking of John, junior's future, when an apparition in pale blue greeted Georgina's astonished eyes.

It was Mrs. Rathbone, in a diaphanous muslin gown, a hat of palest forget-me-nots, holding a sprig of unripe blackberries in her gloved hands. She gave a little shriek of joy upon seeing Lady Ravenscroft, and tripped forward on her high heels.

"How do you *do!*" she cried, beaming beneath Georgina's frigid welcome. "Delighted to meet you again; and dear Mr. Pluff, too, looking so well and sunburnt after his visit to the briny!"

Lady Ravenscroft noticed John showed no sign of surprise. He just gazed adoringly at this faked up specimen of decaying youth, and retained the widow's hand.

"How is it you are here?" asked Georgina, ill-concealing her amazement and displeasure.

"My doctor ordered me country air. I was to take a thorough change, he said. So I thought a little driving tour would do me good. I happened to be passing, when I heard from Mr. Pluff that he was staying in this neighbourhood. An excursion alone is always tedious, so I decided to put up and rest a few days at an ideal farmhouse close by, and was wending my way now to call upon you, Lady Ravenscroft."

Cousin John looked horribly triumphant. He actually appreciated this woman's pursuance of him. It appealed to his conceit.

Georgina said "Oh!" rather expressively, and relapsed into silence.

Mrs. Rathbone held up her blackberry twig pathetically.

"Can you tell me if these nasty, hard, red things are really what we used to eat and enjoy in our childhood?"

"Is it so long that you have forgotten?" asked Lady Ravenscroft sneeringly.

"Yes, indeed. I am thirty-three to-morrow."

Georgina longed to tell Mrs. Rathbone to her face that she was an untruthful cat, and must be fifty if a day, but refrained for the sake of John Pluff and his money bags.

"Oh! that's nothing!" broke in the man's cheery voice, "you're quite a chicken still at thirty-three. Guess you married the General young, for all the adventures you crammed into your married life!"

"Indeed I did! He plucked his flower in its bud. I was only sixteen, and still in the school-room, when he made me his offer. The Bottlemeads protested at first, declaring that such a mere child could not be fitted for the responsibilities of matrimony. But the dear General's persuasive powers prevailed, and then—he was such a good family."

"The General showed his excellent taste," declared Mr. Pluff. "He knew a good thing when he saw it, and didn't let the grass grow under his feet. I admire his foresight. He could tell what you'd grow into—you bet."

"I hope he was not disappointed," sighed Mrs. Rathbone.

The conversation was growing beyond Georgina's powers of endurance.

"Don't let us stand like so many tramps on the roadside," she said testily. "Come, Cousin John, or we shall be late for tea, and Sefton gets dreadfully hungry before five."

She turned without inviting Mrs. Rathbone to accompany them. Mr. Pluff's sense of hospitality was outraged.

"I say, Georgy, you have forgotten your manners, I think. You are goin' to ask Mrs. R. to join us in a cup, eh?"

The widow was blushing as red as her wig.

"Of course, if she likes," replied Lady Ravenscroft, "only you know Sefton has such a headache to-day."

"He didn't mention it to me," retorted her cousin.

"I have no wish to intrude myself upon Lady Ravenscroft," said Mrs. Rathbone, an angry look in her eyes.

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"Oh! don't you notice her," whispered John Pluff, squeezing the widow's elbow. "Georgy can be an awful shrew, but she simmers down. She don't mean no harm. It's just her way."

"A very unpleasant way for all that," replied Mrs. Rathbone. "I shall go back to my humble glass of milk at the farm, and that dreadfully thick brown bread. Which *is* the turning, Mr. Pluff?"

"Georgina," he called to the retreating figure. "I am going to see this lady 'ome, so don't you wait tea."

Lady Ravenscroft turned sharply. She had only made matters worse by her exhibition of temper. They would be alone at the farm, and Mrs. Rathbone's back was up. Who could say into what folly she might lead poor misguided John.

"Please don't be offended," she cooed softly, changing her tactics, "I dare say it will cheer Sefton up. Whatever I say or do on the spur of the moment is always misunderstood!"

Mrs. Rathbone appeared pacified. She was dying to get into Ravenscroft Park.

Lady Ravenscroft shadowed John Pluff for the rest of the day, but when he started out to walk home with Mrs. Rathbone, Georgina's weary feet refused to carry her a yard further. Yet she waited for him at the gate anxiously.

He was an unconscionably long time, and not in the best of humours when his cousin commented on his lengthened absence.

"You don't give a fellow a chance," he said, "to make the running. By Jingo! she's a stunning woman, but don't give you no opportunity to pop the question. She's tip top company so long as you trot 'er out, and do 'er well, but when you begin to get practical she's wonderful shy, and rakes up the dear General just when the words are a swelling and a burning on your tongue. He's never allowed to lie peaceful in his grave, poor chap."

Georgina tottered and nearly fell.

So the game was up! It rested now in the widow's hand!

CHAPTER XVII.

An Accident.

Mr. Pluff spent the remainder of his visit almost entirely in Mrs. Rathbone's society.

He frequently brought her to various meals at Ravenscroft Park, telling Georgina to do the thing in style, and he would settle the accounts at the end of the week.

His cousin, too disgusted to protest, watched the courtship in mute horror.

The apathy of despair was upon her, she felt numb and sick with disappointment.

All her rosy dreams of inheriting John's fortune dwindled.

Surely some guardian angel should have stayed her fingers when she penned that fatal advertisement for a paying guest! Now, just retribution stared her in the face, as she watched Mr. Pluff drive away daily with the widow, to admire the first pallor of autumn's yellow lines upon the dull green trees.

"Such *beautiful* country!" Mrs. Rathbone exclaimed in rapturous tones to Georgina, "and Mr. Pluff has such a poetic soul. You would not believe how deeply he is affected by Nature, quite touching in a man of his build!"

"Yes," retorted Lady Ravenscroft snappishly, "he's too stout for sentiment. At his age he ought to have done with such follies. I wonder you can encourage him."

"Really! Well, we all take different views of human nature, and I believe that the soothing influence of the world beautiful, seen and discussed in the presence of a kindred soul, calms the brute nature, and makes poor, low, grovelling man almost divine!"

The widow raised her eyes upwards as she spoke.

"Bah!" retorted Georgina. "There's not much of the divine in John! But I would rather see good honest feet of clay than hidden vice posing on a pedestal whose foundation is hypocrisy."

"A strongly expressed opinion," murmured Mrs. Rathbone unruffled. "You confuse sentiment and sentimentality, Lady Ravenscroft. They are absolutely different. The first is ennobling, and the second merely the outcome of drivelling morbidity. The only fault I have to find in *dear* Mr. Pluff is his lack of ambition to leave his mark on the world. I am a true Bottlemead, and had I been a man instead of a weak and helpless woman, the craving for immortality which permeates nearly every human breast should never have been left unattained by me! My husband, cut off in his prime, had courage if needful to face the death dealing cannon with a smile upon his lips.

"You will never make a hero of John Pluff," said Georgina bitterly, "and I should hardly think your grand Bottlemeads or the General, who was such a *good* family, would care to see you associating (were they alive) with a man who four years back stood behind the counter of his own grocery store dealing out flour and sugar to the inhabitants of Sydenham."

Georgina watched eagerly for the effect of this speech, but Mrs. Rathbone smiled placidly.

"Mr. Pluff," she murmured, "is by nature refined and gentle. Flour only whitens the hands, and some libellous people *had* told me your cousin was a Soho butcher, though of *course* I never believed it. Still it is pleasant to hear the truth from one of his nearest living relatives."

Georgina bit her lip. The shot had failed.

A pause, during which the subject of their recent conversation appeared in white flannels that suited ill his portly frame, a coat of divers colours, and a straw hat. He

"You don't give a fellow a chance to make the running."

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"You confuse sentiment and sentimentality."

removed the pipe from his mouth upon beholding Mrs. Rathbone. She was gowned in a coat and skirt of navy linen, a coquettish little sailor hat tilted rather on one side rested upon the marvellous red curls of her elaborate wig.

"We're got up regular fine for our expedition!" exclaimed Mr. Pluff.

"Where are you going?" asked Georgina.

"Oh, didn't I tell you? Mrs. Rathbone wanted to go out on the river here. Of course, I know it's a mass of deeps and shallows, and no ordinary rowing boat can be navigated with them rocks about. But the farmer at Mrs. Rathbone's lodgings knew of a young fellow in the village who keeps a canoe. 'That will just suit us,' said I. 'Go and tell the lad I wish to hire it for my lady friend.' So the farmer struck a bargain with the boy, and the boat's waiting now at the stepping-stones; as tidy a little craft as ever I saw."

"But do you know how to paddle it?" asked Georgina. "The stream is very strong. I am sure it is not safe."

She was wondering what her cousin weighed, and whether, if he managed to squeeze his body into the canoe, the frail bark would sink to the bottom.

But John laughed long and loudly at her fears.

"We are not nervous," with a proud glance at Mrs. Rathbone. "There's a woman of spirit for you, Georgina! She won't hesitate to trust herself to me. Dare say we shan't go far, but it's pleasant to lounge on the water. Well, so long, my dear!" waving his hand to Lady Ravenscroft, and offering the widow his arm.

The two sauntered away, Georgina's eyes following them none too kindly.

"Lucky the canoe won't hold three," whispered Mr. Pluff, "or she," jerking his thumb in a backward direction, "would have offered herself as sure as a gun."

"I am afraid my presence here causes Lady Ravenscroft some annoyance. I *wonder* why?"

Mrs. Rathbone raised her eyebrows innocently, half smothering a sigh.

"It's the green-eyed monster, my dear Mrs. R., that is troubling my poor little Georgie, and sometimes I do feel downright sorry for 'er! She is so wrapped up in me, she can't bear not to have my undivided attention. You see her husband is a grumpy sort of chap, and no company!"

"I think he looks mad!" replied Mrs. Rathbone. "His eyes frighten me! He always seems to be staring—staring—at something that is invisible to others. I have felt little shivers all down my spine often when he comes near me, and should never be surprised to hear that an awful tragedy had taken place at Ravenscroft Park."

"No; now you don't mean that, really?" he gasped. "You see his Pa must have had a screw loose to blow out his brains for nothink. You make me regular shuddery!"

"Still I can't be blind to the fact that I depress his wife more than he does."

"Well, to be candid, my dear lady, it's your 'air. She was jealous of it from the first. That Titian tint fairly unsettled her. She has not got much to boast of on 'er own head, and the colour is just muddy! She would give her eyes to grow a pile like yours."

"Now you flatter!" laughed the widow, shaking her flaring curls at him. "Bad boy!"

They were nearing the silver stream, and the sight of the canoe excited Mr. Pluff. He held forth on his nautical powers, how he had steered the *Skylark* off Brighton, and gained a reputation at Margate for rowing out the prettiest girls, and hiring the best boats at the tallest prices.

But Mrs. Rathbone discovered to her sorrow, when

He paddled wildly first one side and then the other

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eventually they were settled in the slender Canadian, that Mr. Pluff had absolutely no idea of managing a canoe.

He paddled wildly first one side and then the other, wobbling it so dangerously—she screamed and implored him to stop.

"It's all right now, I'm getting into it," he assured her. "Don't you fret yourself."

But for his heavy weight acting as ballast, they must have upset. Mrs. Rathbone knew this, and as the tide whirled them down, her terror increased.

She was wise enough, however, to see that Mr. Pluff would never give in so long as she doubted his powers of steering.

"There! You are doing it splendidly!" she gasped, concealing her agitation. "But you must be so hot, and I should enjoy a little quiet chat with you! Supposing we were to stop under that next tree?"

The intonation of her voice, the expression in her eyes, was irresistible. John Pluff could but obey.

She grasped a low bough of the tree gratefully.

"How pleasant and cool it is here!" she murmured. "The peace of this spot charms me!"

A satisfied chuckle broke from her companion, if ever his chance had come it was at this moment.

"*Mrs. R.*," he began determinedly, "now mind," as a faint crimson dyed the whole of her face in a moment, "I'm not to be put off. You've shilly-shallied with me long enough. I've a fine fortune to offer you and a large 'eart, what seems about to burst right out of my shirt whenever you deigns to smile upon me. Now, won't you be pleased to take a second 'usband, and be the bright star of his 'ome, the guiding planet in his empty life?"

A look of perplexity stole into the widow's eyes. Mr. Pluff noticed they had a hunted expression and that she raised her hands as if to ward off something.

He waited in suspense for her reply.

"Your question is a very difficult one for me to deal with," she began nervously, yet gazing at him in the same admiring manner. "Your goodness to me is so overwhelming, your generosity so touching, that I could fall at your feet, were I in a more suitable position to do so, and kiss your very boots. By this you will see that my whole heart is in your keeping, and were it possible for me to become your wife I would marry you to-morrow—but——

"To be candid with you, my dear—John" (she spoke the name tenderly) "I must own to a slight—a very slight deception, which, when you know *all* the circumstances, you will, in your kindness, overlook and forgive."

"Deception? Eh, what's that?" asked Mr. Pluff, pricking up his ears.

"I wanted your friendship, the strong arm of a man to lean upon—one I could trust to the world's end. Have you ever wondered why I am so friendless and deserted, associating with none of my husband's late admirers? My own past is spotless as the driven snow, but *his*——"

Here she broke off again, and applied the corner of a scented square of lace to her lowered eyes.

"Yes—yes."

"His was a great and grand career; but he was frequently led away by impulse, and his sweet, confiding nature was taken advantage of by scoundrels. He is now—poor, gallant soul!—not chained, as you supposed, by the fetters of the grave, but behind the ruthless bolts of a horrible gaol; therefore I throw myself in my loneliness upon your pity—to intreat you not to cast me off, but to respect my confidence and cherish my stricken and empty heart!"

For a moment Mr. Pluff could not speak. Mrs. Rathbone supposed he was overcome by emotion, struck dumb by her pathetic tale. The tone of his voice somewhat took her aback when John Pluff thought fit to reply.

"Oh!" he began, deliberately eyeing her severely, "so you're not a widdy after all, and the dear General's in chokee, is he? A nice fool you've made of me, Mrs. R. If you 'ad confided in me from the first I would have stood by you and respected you. But what I do hold to is honesty and openness. So long as people treat me fair and square I don't say nothing; but when it comes to a lady passing 'erself off as marriageable goods when she's got a live partner of her own locked away—well, I'll be jiggered if I like it. You've been makin' use of me, Mrs. R. You wanted a handy man to trot you about, and burn 'is wings like a bloomin' moth buzzin' round a candle! You 'aven't acted right by me, and no amount of talking will mend the matter. As to calling it a slight, a very slight deception, that's bally nonsense, though of course I don't know 'ow thin your poor gentleman may be. Still, though the law does think fit to detain 'im, is that any reason why I should dishonour 'is name still further by a-cherishin' of your lonely 'eart. I'm downright disappointed, and that's the truth!"

Mr. Pluff's plain speaking staggered Mrs. Rathbone. She had mistaken her man for once.

"You are very hard, and speak most cruelly!" she whimpered. "I did not know you could be such a monster, or I should not have betrayed my secret."

"Oh, don't you fear as I shall repeat it. I ain't that sort. But what I do say and stick to is that you are not the person I took you for, Mrs. R. I thought you a true and honest woman with noble hinstincts and the right kind of principles. I've been dodging about after you for the last three months for the sole object of placing you at the 'ead of my table, and saying—that's Mrs. Pluff. Now the deal's off, and we'd best part."

Mr. Pluff gurgled and rose to the surface.

He pushed the canoe into mid-stream, and in moody silence Mrs. Rathbone watched her flushed and angered escort frantically endeavour to paddle against the current.

His efforts were futile, the boat turned and twisted till it struck heavily against a rock, lurching violently. In his hurry to right it, Mr. Pluff upset the canoe on the other side. A wild scream and the General's wife was plunged head foremost into the water.

Mr. Pluff gurgled and rose to the surface.

Where was Mrs. R.?

(To be continued.)

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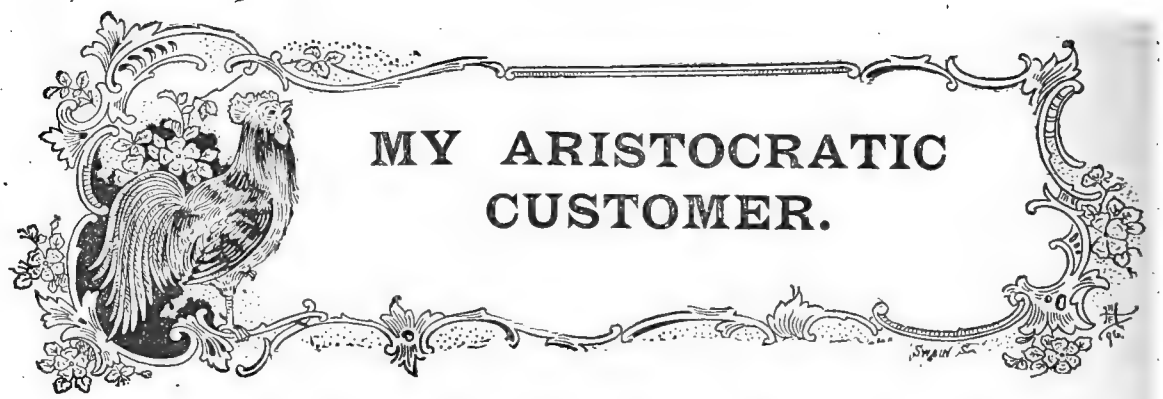

MY ARISTOCRATIC CUSTOMER.

BULLION, my friend, whose laugh as he spoke was not as jolly as usual, is known to be one of the largest and most reliable dealers in jewellery and precious stones in London.

"Was I ever bit?" he said; "yes, I have been bit, and in the worst way, too. As I have acknowledged this much to you, I may as well tell the most complete swindle of which I was ever made the victim.

"One day in August all my assistants but one were away on a holiday, and I was 'tending' shop. Business was dull, and I thought as I gazed out upon the almost deserted streets, but for all the profit there was in keeping open, we might as well shut up and be off.

"My attention was aroused from this reverie by the opening of the shop door. I looked up as there entered a perfect type of the gentleman. His clothing was of the best material, and in thorough taste. He was tall, with snow-white necktie, and gold-rimmed spectacles across his nose. He might have been a bank manager, a member of Parliament, a clergyman. He certainly looked respectable enough to be either.

"'I have been recommended to you, sir—Mr. Bullion, I believe?'—I bowed—'by Messrs. Blank, Blankety and Blank. I understand you have the best assortment of diamonds in London.'

"'I believe that no house in England carries a larger or more varied stock,' I replied.

"'Well, my daughter is with me here from the provinces, and has met the gentleman to whom she has been engaged for several years. He has been through the Burmese war and gained the high promotion he merits, but his leave of absence is short, and I have yielded to the young people that the wedding should take place here.

"'Lacking time to make preparation for more rational gifts, I must do the best I can, and deck her out with the jewels that all women love so well. At all events, diamonds are a good investment. Let us see what you have.'

"I displayed my entire stock, tray after tray of glittering gems I produced, and though he handled them and held them up in different lights, there was not one sign of those suspicious movements which we dealers have learned to know so well and to watch for so closely.

"At last he made his selections—a pair of earrings sixty pounds, a bracelet one hundred pounds, a brooch twenty-five pounds, a solitaire ring forty pounds, and a lace pin for the only bridesmaid twenty pounds. All these were set with the finest first-water diamonds; two hundred and forty-five pounds—rather a good hour's work for a hot August morning.

"While it was being done up, the gentleman was busy counting over the contents of a large pocket-book, and when I handed him the small but valuable package and the bill (the bill, from force of habit, being presented a little in advance) he passed me over some bank notes. There were two hundred and forty pounds in all.

"Replacing the large pocket-book in his breast pocket, he produced a small purse, and proceeded to pay the balance. After searching in every pocket he found himself a sovereign short.

"While he fumbled and fussed, and while I partly occupied myself in trying to look as though I was paying no attention to him, I noticed a rather roughly dressed, thick-set man pass and re-pass the door. Then he came up and flattened his nose against the plate glass window. His next move was to place his body inside the door and close it. Then, with a sigh of relief and a disgustingly familiar wink towards me, he said, under his breath: 'In time, after all?' then stepped up to my customer, whose back had been turned to him, and smacked him on the shoulder.

"'Hey, Dick, at your old tricks yet, are you?'

"The gentleman turned round and seemed to be struck speechless. As for me, I was red-hot with rage.

"'What do you mean?' I demanded, 'by coming into this place and insulting my customer? Who are you, sir?'

"'Customer, eh? Been buying, has he? He's a nice customer, he is; and as to who I am and what I mean, there's my card, that'll soon tell you all you want to know.'

"'I don't want your card, sir. This gentleman has bought my goods and paid for them—paid for them, sir!' and I glanced at the card and saw detective thereon, but still I was not ready to believe. 'I don't care if you are a dozen detectives, you can't insult gentlemen in my shop; I'll call a policeman.'

"'Call three or four if you want to,' said the rough intruder; 'but, Dick,' and now he addressed the gentleman, 'will you go quietly with me, or will you not?'

"Judge of my amazement to hear my elegant customer exclaim; 'You've got me dead, wot's the use o' chinnin'?' and then the mask fell, and I could see what a sleek-looking, deep villain he was.

"'You see, sir,' said the rough man to me, in a tone of apology, 'this is Diamond Dick, the downiest jewel thief in the business. I know his lay, and saw him come in here, and I think you'll say it's mighty lucky I did.

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What he paid you may look all right, but you'll find something crooked in it. Anyhow, he's 'wanted' for three or four other jobs in as many places.'

"To say I was astonished is to draw it very mildly. I was so dumfounded that I lost my head completely.

"'Jest let me see the cash he gave you,' said the detective, and I handed it over.

"'Jest so,' said he, again; 'I'll jest take charge of this until we get to the office, and,' putting his hand in the villain's pocket, 'I'll jest take charge of these shinersalso, then you'll know they are all safe.' And he transferred money and jewellery to his own pocket.

"My former customer was surly and had nothing to say. Of course, I had to accompany them to the police station. I bade my assistant call a carriage, and we all entered. A short drive brought us to the police station. The cells were in the basement, the office on the floor above.

"The carriage halted. Under instructions from the detective I alighted and entered the office, to wait until he locked his prisoner in a cell downstairs, prior to making a formal complaint. As I closed the door of the room I heard the carriage drive away.

"I waited five minutes, ten, fifteen, and then heartily out of patience, I abruptly made my way into the presence of the Inspector, and demanded when he was going to take the charge against Diamond Dick, and asked the whereabouts of the detective.

"The Inspector stared.

"I explained.

"The Inspector smiled.

"I became angry.

"Then he grew serious.

"'My dear sir,' said he, 'you are evidently the victim of an artfully planned robbery. The villain and detective are confederates, and your money and diamonds are, I am afraid, lost to you for ever. I am very sorry, and will help you all I can, but you see it will be a difficult job to track the thieves down. We have absolutely no clue to work upon.'

"And a difficult job it proved—too difficult, in fact, for Scotland Yard to cope with, for I never set eyes on my gems again." H. P. Leggett.

THE TRAITRESS.

BY leaning out of the little balcony of my town chambers I could catch a glimpse of the street-artist who worked on the pavement below; I could see the top of his venerable, white-haired head, and occasionly had a momentary vision of two white hands outstretched in an appeal for aid from the passers-by.

These hands particularly interested me. It seemed remarkable in a man of his age and occupation that they should be so white and smooth and delicate. The fingers were long and slender, and the nails well kept and pointed. His face, too, was none the less remarkable, for beneath the rags and dirt that he affected I could see that he must once have been a handsome man. As an artist I observed this, although to a casual passer-by it would not be noticeable; an artist is one who can see beauty in everything.

In the same way I observed that the woman who lived in the great house opposite must also once have been beautiful. In spite of the paint and the veils and the ungainly clothing and her withered cheeks and sunken eyes, I could imagine her with the freshness of youth and health upon her; and she was surprisingly lovely.

When I had nothing better to do, I would sit in my window and wait until she should come out to take the air. Presently her carriage would drive up; a magnificent equipment with its silvered harness, prancing horses and liveried men. The butler would swing open the door, and my lady, passing by the bowing footmen, would come to the top of the steps. Then a strange thing would happen. She would pause for a moment and throw a glance at the figure of the street-artist across the road; she would shiver, and shrink away; then she would run hastily down the steps, and with one last look, into which was thrown a mingling of hate and loathing and fear, she would enter her carriage and drive quickly away.

On these occasions I leant over the balcony and looked at the old man below. He would be sitting forward, with his white hands held out in front of him, his head thrown back, and a fine look of triumph, scorn, and defiance in his bright eyes.

When my lady drove home again a similar scene would be enacted. As the carriage approached the house she would shrink away from the street-artist; yet her eyes would invariably be drawn towards his, and shivering, she would quickly leave the carriage and seek the safety of home.

It was an oppressive, sultry day in July, when London was broiling under the hot sun, that I first became acquainted with the street-artist. I had paused for a moment to admire a ship he had drawn, and to give him my usual donation, when I noticed he was sitting forward in a huddled position, with his head on his knees. He was evidently suffering from the heat. I asked him whether he would come up to my rooms and have something to refresh him. He refused at first, but eventually I had my way, and, collecting his things together, I took his arm and led him upstairs to my comfortable bachelor quarters.

I sat him down in my easiest chair and mixed him a reviving drink. He sipped it gratefully, and seemed happy.

After that I frequently took compassion on him, and in the end we became firm friends.

One day when he was in my room his eye fell on a little silver vase which I numbered among my treasures. I had thrown a bunch of violets into it as I came in the night before, and when he had finished examining the workmanship he sniffed the flowers eagerly.

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Then he leant back in his chair and sniffed them again.

"They remind me——" He checked himself abruptly, and put the vase hastily down. "They remind me of something," he said.

"There is nothing," I remarked, "that brings back old memories so much as a scent. The whiff of certain brands of cigarettes, for instance, or the scent on a woman's handkerchief or dress, or, as in your case, of a flower. Won't you confide in me?"

I refilled his glass and he took up the vase again, sniffed the violets once more, then leant back on the cushions, and told me his story in a few tragic words.

"These were the flowers that she always wore. She was wearing them that night in the conservatory. I shall never forget it. She was lying back in a low chair by my side, with her hands hanging down, and her eyes half closed, looking languidly into mine. She allowed me to take her hands, to stroke them, and fondle them, and to whisper a hundred sweet things in her ears. I was mad. She turned me mad. I swear that she led me on, until I was mad."

The old man leant forward, and his voice was very eager.

"Then I told her of my hopes and ambitions. I was young then; only between twenty and thirty years old. But I had my dreams and ideals, and what is more I had turned them into practical form.

"When I was nineteen I had an idea. Only two living people knew how great and how mighty an idea it was; it would have revolutionised the whole world. From that moment I thought of nothing else. I spent my fortune in fulfilling it, thousands and thousands, too many to count, and on the same night that I allowed a woman to turn my brain, the time had come—my model worked.

"That night I sat alone in my workshop, and saw my hopes fulfilled. I allowed my mind to wander, and leaning back from the table, I fell asleep and dreamt a strange dream of my conquest of the world.

"Two days later she came to see me. Beautiful as she had looked that night in the conservatory, she was ten times more lovely as she stood at the door, her fingers resting on the handle, and a smile on her lips. I sprang forward to meet her, and, taking her in my arms, I kissed her. She returned my embrace.

"She said she had come to hear more of my ambitions, and to see my ideal. And I, fool that I was, innocent, trusting fool, I led her to my secret working place, and lying beneath its glass globe I showed her my model.

"Then I told her of the dream that I had had the night before, and I asked her to share my triumph. Already I had held out my arms to claim her for my own, when suddenly the love-light died out of her eyes, and stepping back she said, in cold tones that haunt me to this day: 'Perhaps you are not aware, sir, that in a week's time I marry Lord Gateacre.'

"I was numbed: I could not speak or breathe; I felt as a brute animal must feel when a slaughterer's axe finds a resting place in its brain; I believe my heart broke.

"At that moment I heard a sharp click. My eyes fell on a tiny camera that she concealed in her hand. The sound brought me to life again. She thought, no doubt, that I would be too numbed to move.

"She was about to photograph my model.

"In an instant I realised everything. My brain found the reason of it all as in a flash. She had led me on to love her, in order that, in my mad passion, she might wean from me my secret. Then she would take it to her chosen master and sell it to him.

"Now she had almost learnt it; with the photograph that she would take, she would be able to understand it. Ah, the traitress! The vile, the accursed traitress!

"I seized the delicate model in both hands, and holding it high above my head, I hurled it from me; it crashed against an iron anvil, and fell, broken into a thousand fragments at her feet.

"At the same instant the camera clicked again, but my outstretched hands was all that the photograph revealed. I have preserved them as they were then, and she dreams of them every night.

"I turned round, and I believe I should have seized her by her white throat and strangled her. But she had fled.

"A week later she was married. As she stepped proudly down from her carriage, holding the arm of her lord, she saw me, as you see me now, squatting at the side of the street, with my hands outstretched, and my eyes gleaming, and she looked on the life that she had ruined.

"She was carried into the house, senseless.

"Since that day I have sat in front of her home, and I look at her as she comes out, and I look at her as she drives away, and I look at her when she comes back. I haunt her always, she dreams of me at nights, her beauty fades, she grows old and shrunken, and she will die."

The old man leant back on the cushions, and reached out his hand for the violets.

His story had exhausted him.

J. M. Woodward.

JUMBLED STORY COMPETITION.

No. 8.

Six Prizes, one of £5 and five of £1 each, are offered to the competitors who most nearly put together the lines of the story appearing on the next page in their original order. Each line is complete in itself, but the title and author's name are jumbled up.

Cut out the lines separately, and paste them up in what you consider to be their correct, readable order on one side of the paper, and send the story in an envelope marked "Jumbled Story," to *Short Stories*, Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, London, W.C.

All competitions to be in by Monday, August 24th.

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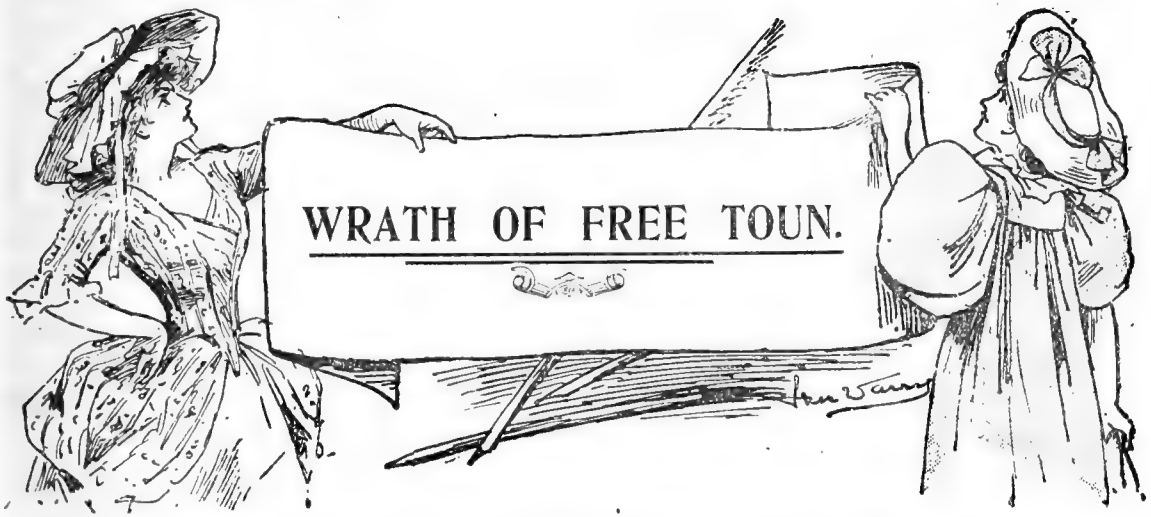
JUMBLED STORY. No. 8.]



The sentiment was a truly patriotic one.

Sedan had fallen but a few days before; and all Germans whom they had met up to the present had open eyes.

They marched away from the little valley with bands as the sun was rising gloriously and pouring his rays in the vicinity of the regimental stores.

In the hurry of departure they soon forgot a little national disgrace.

But they were not disposed to take much trouble in France.

They did not understand.

Later in the day a poor-looking woman with one child had been recently disturbed, and who was weeping excuses made by a dirty little Polish Jew.

The miserable Jew whined and wept, and protested qualifications for acting the part of judge.

It was easy enough to guess his nationality; he was a German: and it is clear that he is nothing but a German Frenchmen felt that nothing but blood could wipe out the enemy.

They had caught him red-handed, absolutely attempting to understand him.

And none thought of the woman with the ragged shawl whom they had just shot as a spy.

They were in no humour just then for sifting the Polish Jew than the German armies.

So they brought him before the general, a bluff, hard general, when they told him that his orders had been playing, colours flying, and the various other accompaniments of "glorious war."

"What were you doing there?" thundered the general. It will encourage the others."

"He was sneaking about near the bread waggons, that day, "a likely story, I must say. Where are his dirty beard, which evidently had not been trimmed for this important capture.

"Where was he found, do you say?" he asked.

He was a miserable enough looking specimen of general," was the reply of the lieutenant who had made that he was doing no harm—that he was only looking around her head, lying beside the mound where the sod proved to be.

"*Sacré nom,*" he exclaimed, "the little fool. Why but his cries fell upon deaf ears. Mercy!—after Sedan!

It would make a beginning, as it were.

"Bread!" sneered the general, who had dined well drinking, hard-swearing soldier, with as much feeling in weeks past.

At least that is what he tried to tell them.

And it was so much easier to overcome a diminutive wife and children, I should like to know. He only speaks before a platoon, and bound his eyes.

Besides, he was easier to deal with than most of the humanity, in all conscience, small and thin, with a husband, who had left her the previous evening to try red-handed, prowling about within the French lines, for a bit of bread to bring back to his wife and childen.

The general was told about the mistake they had made.

So they took her, and showed her the newly-made Jew, and the Jews have never been a popular people in the camp, and began to make anxious inquiries about her spy. Take him away and let him be shot at daybreak.

Of course, the blood of this weedy-looking wretch could duly carried out.

The unfortunate wretch implored them for mercy; and obtain food for herself and the children.

"So perish all enemies of France!" exclaimed the grave.

They took him away, and on the following morning, his body as there is in a plank board, and about as many not be reckoned as very much; but it was something.

A likely thing, forsooth.

They threw him into a hastily made grave; and down upon the small valley, they led him forth, put him in her arms, and leading another by the hand, came into then prepared to retreat further before the advancing incident like this.

They questioned her; and after some time they found bitterly; while her two children looked on with wide that the missing husband was none other than the Jew did he not say so?"

The word was given, the rifles rang out, and the little Jew fell forward upon his face, dead.

After all, it was only the fortune of war.

JOHN TORNS.

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KEY TO JUMBLED STORY. NO. 5.] [SEE PAGE 237.

A WOMAN'S TRICK.

Briefly, the situation was this: Lord Douglas had declined to give the appointment of Minister of Pepotoi to his old college friend, Deane; he had, in fact, intimated in his formal letter, that he had selected Diggles for the post.

Now Diggles, as all the world knew, was brother-in-law to Mrs. Montague; but whether this had anything to do with the matter it was not known. People said it had.

For they had noticed that his lordship made himself very pleasant to that lively and vivacious widow.

And it was known that she was for ever in dearth of flowers and jewels. Certain it was that she was now kept very well supplied with them.

Perhaps, for this reason, she cultivated Lord Douglas, in spite of the fact that with every package he inclosed something less acceptable (and less substantial) than the offering.

It should be mentioned, moreover, that Lord Douglas, in a moment of pressing need, had tied himself down for life to a very ineligible personage.

He himself bore his years well, and looked, especially in his long frock coat, every inch the Cabinet Minister that he was. With his wife, however, it was different. She seemed to grow stouter and shorter and redder as every year advanced. Finally, he was compelled to leave her down in the country, through fear that she should be mistaken for his housekeeper, whenever he was in town.

To make the situation clear, it should be added also that his lordship lived in mortal dread lest it should reach his wife's ears that anything beyond the strictest line of acquaintanceship passed between Mrs. Montague and himself.

Mr. Deane, the disappointed aspirant to the Ministership of Pepotoi, had long lived in hopes of obtaining this post.

It meant a good deal more to him than people supposed.

He was a hard-working, capable man, if not particularly brilliant, and he had every right to expect that it should have been his. It was clear to see that Diggles had obtained it merely on account of the fact that he was brother-in-law to Mrs. Montague.

The blow had fallen on Deane and his pretty little wife as they were taking their first sip of coffee one morning at breakfast. His face fell as he read the letter, and, with a mumbled apology, he gathered his other papers together and hastily left the room.

His wife looked wistfully after him, and then at his uneaten breakfast. She read the letter through, and her mouth took a determined expression.

That afternoon Mrs. Deane dropped in at the well known jewellers of Bond Street, Messrs. Brightstone and Rubett. As an esteemed customer she was privileged to wander about the shop at will until she should chance on a suitable trinket for a wedding present.

It happened that her search led her to a counter where two immense bronzes had been placed for the time. Although engrossed in the tray of knick-knacks which the assistant was displaying, she noticed, herself unseen, the glass doors swing open, and a tall, commanding-looking man enter.

"Is that pearl necklace ready yet?" he demanded.

Messrs. Brightstone and Rubett bowed low to the counter. They were very sorry, but it had not arrived; it would come in a couple of hours.

Could they send it off for his lordship? It would go by the five-o'clock post without fail. Would his lordship be good enough to give the address?

"203, Craven Road, Park Lane," replied his lordship in a loud voice, and strode angrily from the shop.

Mrs. Deane's heart stopped beating. She felt as though she would like to shriek. Here was an opportunity dropped right at her feet. She had only to stretch out her hand and take it, and she would win her game. She had thought all the morning of some means by which she might work the combination of Lord Douglas and his jealous wife, and Lord Douglas and pretty Mrs. Montague, and here was the solution.

"Have you any pearl necklaces?" she asked.

Messrs. Brightstone and Rubett had a few in stock, but, unfortunately, all of an inferior quality. Madame might have one at a bargain.

"Lord Douglas has just ordered a similar one to this," the firm continued, holding up for inspection a necklace of unique form.

Mrs Deane concluded the bargain, and drove away with the purchase.

She wondered, as she went home, if it was very wicked, this plot that she had devised. It was a chance, however, of ousting Diggles, and not to be missed.

At his office next morning the first thing Lord Douglas did was to write to Diggles, informing him of his appointment as Minister of Pepotoi. Then he looked at his letters. Among others was one which made him turn very pale when he had read it. He studied it again, and grew still paler.

It was written in a feminine hand, and ran as follows:

"Dear Lord Douglas,—I am in terrible perplexity: Two roads lie before me, and I do not know which to take. I ought, I feel, to let your dear wife know everything I have learnt. But on second thoughts I determined to send the parcel which I received by mistake this morning from Messrs. Brightstone and Rubett direct to you, and hear what you said. Yesterday I ordered a pearl necklace, and this morning I received one, but a different one, and one of superior quality. On a card inside was written: 'To Mrs. Montague, 203, Craven Road, Park Lane,' and below: 'With Lord Douglas' compliments.' I still keep the necklace, and await your reply as to what I shall do with it.—Yours sincerely, Mary Deane.

"P.S.—Your letter was such a disappointment. Will you not reconsider your decision?—M. D.

"P.S.S.—I still feel that I ought to write to your wife.—M. D."

Lord Douglas read this letter through three times; then he bit his lip hard, and his voice was very shaky, as, turning to his secretary, he said: "Have you posted that letter to Diggles yet?"

No, my lord," the man replied; "I was about to address the envelope."

"Then you may leave it," said Lord Douglas. "I have decided, after all, to give the position to Deane."

And Mrs. Deane chuckled to herself when the next post came in.

J. Marcus.

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By George Manville Fenn.

SUMMARY.

The story opens with an interview between Lady Braetoun and her son Roderick, in which she endeavours to induce him to give up "Baby" Lee, a chorus girl, and marry Olive, Isaac Emsworth's heiress. Emsworth takes Olive to consult Dr. Murray, who advises a voyage to South Africa in the *Greyberg*, in which he also is going. Roderick, who is friendly with Murray, comes for advice on the terribly bad condition of his health, and the Doctor recommends a trip in the same boat. "Baby" Lee, on being discarded, seeks means of revenging herself on Olive.

CHAPTER X.

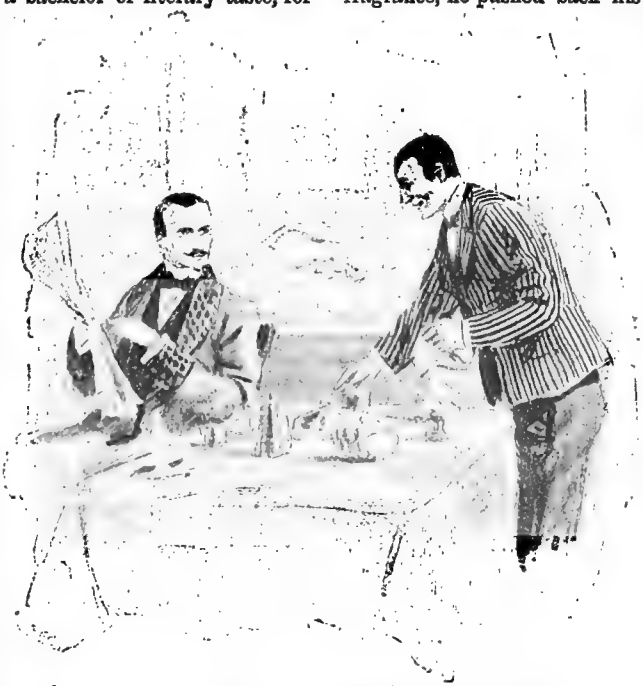
A Blackguardly Compact.

Cyrus Daines had just seated himself at the table to enjoy his breakfast, armed with the last new review and a paper-knife looking like an ivory scimitar, carved as it was out of a huge walrus tusk. The room was the very perfection of a dwelling-place for a bachelor of literary taste, for it was lined as far as it was possible with well-crammed bookcases, and where it was not possible for a bookcase to stand, pictures, old china, curious weapons, and bits of *bric-à-brac* that were quaint and pleasing to the eye, and for the most part Japanese, filled up the gaps.

The place did not betoken wealth in its owner, but a tendency to comfort, and the situation was good, being a front room on the first floor in Jermyn Street, a heavily draped archway indicating — correctly — that there was a bedchamber behind.

The occupant, who laid down review and paper-knife beside his plate and coffee-cup, and took up a flower vase to sniff at some choice roses which decorated the attractive breakfast table, was a keen-eyed, fair, young-looking man of thirty, large of forehead—white as a woman's—and showing the net-work of blue veins in his temples; small of the lower portion of his face, his chin being made to look more pointed by a sharply trimmed beard of the smallest dimensions, and still more sharp by making the most of a tiny moustache with wax. Good-looking, but not attractive; for, to continue, everything was too sharp; his dark grey eyes were piercing, and his slightly aquiline nose, though beautifully and classically shaped, looked as if the skin had been too tightly drawn over the bone, while his white teeth seemed the sharpest of all. The very aspect of the man indicated that his tongue would be a keenly pointed weapon, kept well on edge for the benefit of his friends and discomfiture of his enemies, of which such a man would be sure to have many.

He was most carefully dressed, with the exception of the dressing-gown he wore, which was old and worn and emitted a peculiarly strong odour of choice tobacco, the means for smoking which were visible in various shapes about the room, and the scent of the roses having possibly suggested another kind of incense or fragrance, he pushed back his chair, and rose to cross to the mantel-piece, walking with a slight limp, and showing a peculiar attenuation of figure.



The man . . . went on arranging the bright breakfast service.

Invalid, who makes a brave effort to fight his weakness, you involuntarily said, weak from accident of birth, not from dissipation.

He took a cigarette from a box, lit it, and went back to the table and picked up the morning's paper, glanced at the Summary, and then turning to the sporting news, ran his eye down, pitched the paper aside and touched a table gong, which emitted a keenly piercing, silvery ring.

"Poor old Rod!" he said, with a contemptuous laugh, as he examined his long, thin, white hands, turned his signet ring a little round, drew down his cuffs, and subsided into his chair. "Gone again. Well, he must have got well through all he has, and now starts with a fresh fortune—if they'll let him. Not bad taste."

Just then the door opened, and a man-servant in neat striped jacket entered with a tray containing coffee-pot, toast-rack, hot roll, and something savoury of odour in a covered dish.

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"No letters, Joe?"

"No, sir; nothing but the paper this morning. Lord Braetoun's horse nowhere yesterday, sir; forgot to tell you when you came home last night."

"Which means, you stupid idiot, that you had something on the race. And I told you not."

The man coughed slightly, and went on arranging the bright breakfast service.

"How much did you lose?" continued his master, taking up the great paper-knife and holding it as if about to decapitate the disobedient slave.

"Nothing, sir. Won."

"How was that?"

"Well, sir," said the man deprecatingly, "when you pick up a few tips, and know as a gent always has the luck against him, why, if you bet at all, you don't back."

"So I pay you good wages and find you a very comfortable, easy place, so that you may take advantage of the knowledge you gain of my friends to help to fleece them."

"Beg pardon, sir," said the man in an aggrieved tone, "I didn't win it of his lordship."

"That will do," said the master sharply, and the man left the room.

"Somebody else has, though, I'll be bound. Eh? What do you want?"

"Beg pardon, sir: his lordship."

There was a quick step on the landing, and Braetoun, looking haggard and careworn, strode in, giving his hat and cane to the man, before throwing himself into an easy chair.

"Morning!—Another cup and plate, Joe.—What'll you have?"

"Nothing," said the visitor sourly.

"Yes, you will.—Devilled kidneys and some tea—quick as you can."

The man glided out of the room, and the owner of the rooms began to pour himself out some coffee.

"Call him back, Cy. I want some brandy and soda."

"I suppose so; and you'll have tea. You did look decent day before yesterday. Seem to have had a wet night. What a fool you are, Rod."

"Tell me something I don't know, will you?" said the visitor bitterly.

"You don't know that yet. Here, you were regularly pulled round by that sea trip, and old Murray together, dropped in for a magnificent piece of luck, all going well, and you must begin the old game again. How long will it take you to learn that you must lose over horses in the long run, and that when you do, brandy won't bring the money back?"

"There, don't you turn against me, Cy. I came for comfort, not abuse."

"Come to the wrong shop then. I can't comfort. I can show you your faults."

"I don't want showing them; they're always dancing before me like so many devils."

"Had more brandy than I thought for last night. Better go and see Murray or you'll be having a mad fit again."

"Curse Murray!"

"That's right. Always curse those who do you good. Have a turn at me too. Go on. It will not spoil my breakfast."

"Do, for Heaven's sake, keep that vitriol tongue of yours quiet for a few minutes. Can't you see I'm in trouble?"

"Plain enough; but 'vitriol tongue' is good, though rather strong. But if you will risk money on races what is the good of ruining your health—I mean the apology for it you've got left—by flying to the brandy because you lose?"

Braetoun made an angry gesticulation, and shifted his position on the chair, started up, and crossed to a side table on which stood a water-cooler, poured himself out a glass and tossed it off.

"Hot coppers, eh? Can't recommend that water, old fellow; better have waited for the tea. I can back that."

"Cy, old man, I'm in a devil of a mess," cried the visitor throwing himself again in the chair.

"My dear Rod, you've been in a devil of a mess ever since we were at Eton. It is your nature to."

"And I want you to help me."

"Old story, and you know as well as I do that I can't. If I did play the gallantly heroic faithful friend, and raised money on all I've got, and backed your bills, it would only be trying to make one drop fill the Trafalgar Square fountains."

"Who said a word about money?" cried Braetoun savagely.

"You didn't mention it," said the other, eating away calmly, "but your words chinked like coin and rustled like paper. Want words then?"

"Yes; help and advice."

"Acts, deeds, and exploits, eh? Well, fire away."

"You are so clever."

"Excuse my rising to return thanks."

"You've got a way of getting over people with that tongue of yours."

"False, base flattery. Didn't I try to get that old scoundrel of a money-lender to renew your bills, and failed dismally?"

"Oh, that's nothing; money-lenders have no hearts, but ——send that fellow away as soon as you can."

For the man had entered with a fresh breakfast-tray, and proceeded to arrange the things in front of Braetoun very slowly and with great care, as if from sympathy with the loser of a race by which he had benefited.

"That will do, Joe," said his master, and the man left the room, feeling as if he would like to stay.

"Now then," said Daines sharply, "what do you want me to do?"

"Well, look here. You know I ran my colt at Highdown yesterday?"

"And lost. I know."

Braetoun winced a little, but went on:

"The Emsworths were down there."

"To see you lose. Look here, you want help. Take my advice: don't let the old man see any more of your losing games, or he'll be crying off with the match."

"There'll be no need; I'm going to drop all that now."

"He knew you lost?"

"Yes; but that wasn't the worst of it. They had taken down lunch, and the mater was with them."

"Yes; she is playing her cards very nicely for you, my son."

"Don't be a fool," said Braetoun angrily.—"We were in the midst of lunch and wine when someone came."

"The murdered Banquo to the feast?"

"Someone as bad. She came up towards the carriage."

"Which she?" said Daines caustically.

"If you are going to keep on fooling I must go," said Braetoun angrily. "You know whom I mean."

"I'm mum. Go on: I suppose you mean Baby Lee."

"Yes: came on purpose to make a scene. I could read it in her eyes; she was going to make a furious attack upon Miss Emsworth, when she had a sort of hysterical fit, and had to be carried off the ground. Fortunately Murray was with us, and he helped to get her away."

"Did he know who she was?"

"He seemed to guess from her words."

"And did Miss Emsworth, and your mother?"

"No, they didn't quite understand it. She hadn't time to speak. Passion, I suppose, but she was quite overcome. They fancied she had been betting on my colt, lost, and was savage with me."

"Then it turned out all right for you, and there's no need for help."

"But there is. I tremble for the future."

"Bah! Part from her civilly. Tell her the comedy's at an end, and you're going in for tragedy."

"I'm afraid it's tragedy now, and she'll stop the comedy to come."

"Oh, rubbish! Behave well to her; she seems a nice little woman."

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"I did all I could; gave her the house, furniture, and carriage, and a heavy cheque."

"That ought to satisfy her."

"But it doesn't. She has returned everything—presents and money, and letters."

"Give her some diamonds then."

"Where am I to get diamonds? I'm regularly stumped."

"Pooh! Not you. As soon as they know in Bond Street that you're to marry a wealthy heiress, you may order all the diamonds you like."

"She wouldn't take them, Cy. You don't know what a temper she has—I do."

"Strikes me, Rod, old fellow, that after all she must really care for you."

"I'm afraid she does," said Braetoun gloomily.

"Poor fellow; how horrible! Why, what a little fool the woman must be. It's ridiculous. But what can I do for you?"

"Help me, man; I daren't go to her now. I'm an engaged man, and I live in constant dread that she will call on the Emsworths and make a horrible scene."

"Yes: that would be awkward. The father would be furious, and the lady—nice, sweet innocent little body, by-the-way—would throw you over as sure as a gun."

"That she would," said Braetoun.

"Thinks you're a *preux chevalier*, and that sort of thing. Well, Roddy, old man, it strikes me that you're in what our friends across the water would call a pretty considerable muss."

"Well, I don't come here to be told that."

"S'pose not. Why did you come?"

"To see if you would help."

"Strange thing how my old school-fellows do come to me for help, especially if there's a lady in the case. Safe sort of card to play, I suppose. Little weakly cripple, and to be trusted."

"Of course, you always were a good clever fellow, Cy, and ready to help a lame dog over a style."

"*Similia similibus curantur*; lame dog to help another lame dog, eh?"

"That's it. Now then, set your wits to work. The mater's dead upon my marrying little Emsworth."

"Well, it would be the making of you. I suppose you could keep the old man out of sight."

"Oh, yes; I don't suppose we should be bothered much about him after we were married."

"Very warm, Rod?"

"I suppose so, but its rather a come down for a Braetoun to marry the daughter of such a man."

"Yes, it is, but money's money, my lad, and the lady is very presentable."

"Yes, she is rather nice."

"Wouldn't be if she knew all."

"There, that'll do. Now come, don't beat about the bush, say something, don't keep on eating."

"Give me time, old man, I ruminate like an ox when I eat, I'm thinking away all the time. It's a knotty point. You see, it's a grand thing, I should say, speaking as a slack-baked waster from old Mother Nature's pottery, upon whom the fair sex has never cast the amatory eye—a splendid thing for a man to have the chance of marrying a woman who really cares for him."

"And has an enormous fortune."

"Ye—es," said Daines, pushing away his plate and putting some more sugar into his coffee, to sit stirring it round and round; "but have some more tea."

"Oh, confound your tea! Talk—talk—talk! This worry tells upon me. I'm as seedy to-day as can be."

"A grand thing to be able to marry a woman who really worships you and thinks you perfect."

"Well, that's how a woman ought to feel about the man she marries," said Braetoun coolly.

"But, from what I've seen of life, not one woman in a score does. Soon gets to know too much of a man's seamy side, I suppose."

"Look here, Cy; you're getting into one of your confoundedly talky-talky moods, when you grow more cynical and say nastier and more spiteful things every minute. I've come for a sensible, matter-of-fact way out of this difficulty. Where are your cigarettes?"

"Old spot, dear boy; help yourself."

Braetoun took and lit one, to begin smoking fitfully.

"Now, then," he said; "come back to the subject. What would you do if you were me?"

"Do? Well, if I found out that a woman really worshipped me, and had proved her love, I should say to myself: 'That girl is as near perfection as mundane angels can be,' and I should consider that her genuine love covered everything. I should marry her as soon as I could."

"Well, of course, it's all so new. I haven't found out all that yet, but it's going on all right. I'm the better for my trip. The old man's willing, and I shall marry her as soon as I can."

"I was talking about the other one," said Daines quietly.

"What," roared Braetoun, dashing down his cigarette; "marry a ballet girl! I?"

"Man raises the woman he marries to his own station, dear boy."

"Cy, you're a fool."

"Can't help it. Nature made me the fool and cripple you see, and foolish parents insisted upon cheating the undertaker by rearing me."

"Marry Baby Lee, of the Theatre Royal, Thespis, when I I'm almost without a shilling!"

"If the girl loves you as you say, you'll be a rich man, Roddy."

"You idiot! If you weren't such a wretched little cripple I'd shake you till you couldn't speak. Confound your sharp-edged tongue! You said all that to get a rise out of me, just when I'm in the greatest hobble I was ever forked into in my life."

There was a little reddening of Daines' thin, white cheeks, but he went on unmoved.

"Best advice I can give you for both your sakes, and for that of the lady heiress as well. Rather hard on her, dear boy."

"Ha, ha! Here's little Diogenes Daines turning moralist. Look here: you'd better marry the girl yourself."

"The heiress?"

"You!" cried Braetoun, with a look of contempt which slightly deepened the colour in his friend's cheek. "Bah! —Baby. Now, that would be a way out of the difficulty."

"Perhaps she wouldn't have such an idiotic little cripple, Rod."

"I don't know. You've got what Paddy calls a soothering tongue of your own when you like to make it so. I believe you could humbug any woman into thinking you cared for her. Why, Cy, old man, she'd be the very thing for you. Damme, I'd give you five thou. if you'd marry her—I'd give you ten."

"Out of your wife's money?"

"Never you mind where the money came from," said Braetoun sourly. "I'd give it to put an end to the difficulty."

"And a very nice generous, manly offer," said Daines, lighting a cigarette.

Braetoun winced and stared hard at the speaker, who went on lighting his cigarette without moving a muscle of his face.

"Look here," he cried, "did you mean that sarcastically?"

"Sarcastic! When you offer me a chance to put ten thousand in my pocket and a pretty little wife on my arm? Hardly such an idiot as that. Well, I'll see the little girl for you and have a talk with her. I may, perhaps, bring her to reason without inflicting a miserable cripple upon her as a husband. Is she still at Brompton?"

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"Don't I tell you she's thrown up everything? No: she's with an old aunt in Great Russell Street. Mrs. Duncan, the costumier."

"Been there and tried to bring her to reason?"

"Yes: twice," said Braetoun sulkily.

"Well?"

"The old cat of an aunt flew at me and told me I ought to be ashamed of myself. Curse her!"

"How people do object to being told home truths," said Daines quietly. "And you told her you were not a bit ashamed, eh?"

"Wrong. I told her I was deucedly ashamed to be seen coming to her old rag shop, and that she and her niece ought to have been thoroughly grateful for what I had done, and then I came away."

"Without seeing the little girl?"

"Of course. I didn't want to see her again."

"Go back, old man, and see them both. Make them the offer once more of what they threw up in a pet. Perhaps they'll both have calmed down now."

"No, I can't stoop to do it again. But I'll hold to my bargain. I can't talk to either of them without flying in a passion. Since my illness I'm easily put out. You could go in that calm, cool, dispassionate way of yours and talk them round. Will you go? I give you *carte blanche* to settle the matter for me."

"Rather hard, too, upon me, to send me into the siren's cave. Suppose she really does capture me?"

"Don't be a fool. Will you go for me?"

"Oh, yes, I'll go."

"Cy, old man, you're a trump."

"I am, Rod. But let me see. Theatrical lady. Must introduce myself as a general utility man. Make the best terms for you I can?"

"Make any terms. You see what is at stake. Marry her if you like, and I'll hold to my bargain. The little fool, going on like this! Whatever did she expect?"

"Ah, to be sure, whatever did she expect? They are such fools, these women. They've no brains whatever, only vain little heads stuffed full of a soft kind of pith, which they call faith."

"There, there, there: don't preach, man. You'll do the best you can for me?"

"Of course, I will. And so you'd wish me to marry her?"

"If you liked. She really is a good little thing. But are you in earnest? 'Pon my soul, I never know when you are chaffing and when you are not."

"Wonder if you did," said Daines, looking at him with a peculiar, dry expression of countenance. "Really, old man, I hardly know myself. But, I say, this is serious. Are you going honestly to cut all the past when you marry this Miss Emsworth?"

"I am, on my soul."

"Then, first of all go and see old Murray again. You don't look quite up to the mark."

"Oh, I'm all right; only a bit ruffled over this affair."

"More than ruffled. Rod, you look ill. Go and see him."

"Can't. We're a bit out."

"You can't afford to be out with Murray. What's the matter?"

"I'd give you five thou. if you'd marry her—I'd give you ten."

"I told you, didn't I?" cried Braetoun impatiently. "He was there with us when Baby came up."

"But you told me he helped to get her away."

"So he did, and then, hang him, he began saying things in his bitter, goody-goody style. Curse him! I can't stand it from him. I'm beginning to hate him."

"What did he say?"

"Never mind. Enough to make me feel as if I could shoot him."

"Don't. It would be like committing suicide."

"Why?"

"He told me he was the only man in London who understood your constitution. You've got very shaky, Rod, so take care, and don't kick away the prop that can hold you up."

"He's an offensive prig, with his assumption of what he calls honour and straightforward dealing. I used to like him, but of late——"

"It's grown more t'other, eh?—Going? Well, take care of yourself, while I take care of myself. Ta-ta."

Braetoun nodded and went out of the room, leaving Daines to sit back smoking another cigarette very slowly.

"Why am I going to do all this?" he mused. "I shall be acting like a scoundrel to help a scoundrel, and because we have always been so-called friends.—I'll put on my coat and go at once," he muttered. "Poor little

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Baby, there was always something about her that I liked. Only to think of the little hussy turning out so brave and true."

CHAPTER XI.

A Fish out of Water.

For the tench is said to be the physician among the fish.

It was the first night at the Thespis. The new burlesque was to be produced, with Edwards, of the quaint voice and figure; Lesser, of the dry method and twinkling feet; Ella Weller, who could look fascinatingly pretty, sing, dance, and act as well, for the first lady; and a host of other talent, as it was termed by the lessee—the said talent consisting in the possession of pretty faces, graceful forms, and the ability to act like an artist's lay figure. But with a good orchestra, whose leader had hashed up all the popular songs with *sauce piquante*, pretty scenery, and limelights at every wing, there was enough to attract one of London Society's many circles, and every seat was engaged.

The first-nighters were there in full force, and among them a few who were not first-nighters, unless at the theatres where good comedies were produced, and among these last was Allan Murray, who went, he told his friends, for a little diversion after a great deal of hard work.

There are serious diversions as well as light, and as to himself Allan Murray's diversion was to sit on the prompt side of the theatre, where he could see Lord Braetoun's private box, one of the best in the house—consequent, this, upon the fact that he had been long intimate with the lessee, and had possessed the right to go behind the scenes when the popular favourite, Baby Lee, was the great attraction.

Cyrus Daines, too, had left his blue china and *bric-à-brac*, to appear in faultless evening dress in a stall nearly in the centre of the same row as that in which Murray was seated.

The house filled rapidly, and Murray shook hands with his old college friend, Daines, and fully expected to be bantered in that worthy's most sarcastic manner for coming to a burlesque. But the thin dapper little fellow was particularly quiet, and went on almost directly to his place; and Murray noticed that he kept on glancing from time to time at the empty box on the grand tier—the second from the stage on the off prompt side.

In a few minutes Braetoun entered with his young wife, and as she settled herself in her seat, charming in her full flush of girlish beauty, glittering with diamonds, and carrying an enormous bouquet of lilies and roses, he stood back a little, looking pale and *blasé*, and gazing nonchalantly about the house, as he divested himself of his heavy fur-trimmed overcoat, nodding once or twice to friends in the stalls.

Quite a battery of opera-glasses was directed at once upon this box, and Murray, as he stood up, could hear scraps of conversation about its occupant—"Lady Braetoun"—"just married"—"millionaire's daughter"—"lucky fellow, Braetoun"—"charming"—"too much of the country lass," etc., etc.

But the opera glasses were passed unnoticed by Olive, to whom the scene was enjoyable to a degree. She had come at her husband's suggestion to see the new burlesque, and her eyes wandered here and there, till she caught sight of Cyrus Daines, who bowed to her, and she returned the salute at once. The next moment she had seen the tall dark figure of Murray, and she bent forward with her face lit up with smiles to give him a pleasant nod, turning directly after to call her husband's attention to these friends, with the result that Braetoun scowled.

"What the deuce brings him here?" he said to himself. "Come to stare at us, I suppose." The next minute he had taken his seat, stretched out his hand for the opera-glass he had placed upon the quilted cushion before him, and was focussing it for a sweep round the house, when Murray saw him put it down again quickly and begin talking to his wife.

This was simultaneous with a rustling in the box overhead, into which someone had just been ushered, but who it was the doctor could not have seen had he wished. He was conscious, however, of a curtain being slightly drawn by a delicately gloved little hand, then a great bouquet of yellow roses was laid upon the cushion, and the battery of opera-glasses was directed now in this direction.

A few minutes later Allan saw Daines bow to the fresh-comer, and the bouquet, whose flowers protruded over the quilted satin, was slightly agitated, and he noticed that smiles were exchanged, and men leant forward and whispered one to the other.

"Who is that charmingly dressed little woman in the box opposite to ours?" said Olive.

"Eh? Opposite to ours?"

"Yes; she is wearing black gloves, and is using her ivory opera-glass. I think she is looking across at us."

"Looking across at us?" said Braetoun, with a slight change in his voice. "Oh, yes, I see the one you mean—in mock pearls and the white ostrich-feather edging to her dress. H'm, some actress, I suppose."

Then Braetoun said something unpleasant respecting the lady's future—to himself—and a petillation of clapping ran through the house as the conductor entered, took his place, bowed, and turned back to business.

For almost directly after, the house lit up, the *bâton* was waved in the air, descended, and there was a musical crash, the bright, merry music rippled though the house, and for the next hour Olive sat light-hearted, and almost child-like,

Her eyes wandered here and there.

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"Don't think much of her, but her diamonds are lovely."

giving herself up to the full enjoyment of a scene that was perfectly new to her. Her attention was on the stage all through, and she saw nothing of the pair of bright eyes that hardly left her and her husband. It was nothing to her that they formed the subject of a good deal of conversation among *habitués* of the theatre, and that remarks flew fast at the wings whenever the various members of the company were off the stage.

For the times when Baby Lee was the great attraction at the Thespis were canvassed freely, and ladies who had been jealous of her success were not above meaningly alluding to the way in which some people came down in the world.

"My word!" said one sweet gushing creature, who generally occupied the front end of a line in the chorus when a stage picture was formed, "don't she look pleasant? She's been watching Lord Braetoun most ever since the curtain first went up; and when she hasn't been watching him she's been looking spiteful at his new wife. Don't think much of her, but her diamonds are lovely."

Allan Murray saw but little of the burlesque, heard scarcely anything of the music. He could not gaze at Braetoun's box, but he mentally saw its occupant all the time, and mingled with his depression there was a feeling of satisfaction, purely unselfish, for whenever he had glanced at Olive it was to see that she looked animated and happy, and kept turning to her husband to call his attention to something passing on the stage, while he sat *blasé* and discontented, longing for some excuse to get her away, but finding none.

The drop scene fell at the end of the first act, and there was the customary exodus from the stalls, whose occupants sought the buffet, corridors, and the boxes of friends, or changed places so as to engage in conversation, or discuss the qualities of the new piece.

It was in this change that Cyrus Daines came along the row of stalls to pass Murray, who fully expected to hear him say: "Come out for a cigarette?" But Daines merely nodded, and said something hurriedly about the way being so narrow.

"One moment," said Murray, as Daines passed him. "Who is in this box overhead?"

Daines looked at him curiously.

"Don't you know?" he replied in a low tone.

"How should I? I can't see from here."

"Braetoun's little girl—Baby Lee."

Daines passed on, and Murray sat back in his stall, with a choking sensation at his throat, and then glanced up at Braetoun's box, to see that its owner had left his seat, and that Olive was looking straight through her glass at the box opposite to her; but the next moment she had lowered it and was gazing straight at him.

As soon as Olive saw that Murray was looking at her, she put down her glass and greeted him with a smile, which he read aright, as it seemed to him that she was saying:

"Everybody is visiting friends; why don't you come and see me?"

He could not resist the desire to go round, and he left his seat to pass through the little crowd in the entries, and at last reached Braetoun's box, feeling glad that he had not encountered his patient on the way. For a hot feeling of anger was rising in his breast, with a very strong suspicion that he knew where Braetoun would be. And if, face to face there, Olive should see her husband in company with this woman, and ask him who she was—with that sweet ingenuous look in her eyes, what was he to say?

"So base—so cruel!" he thought. "I dare not go."

For a few moments he paused, hesitating. Then, as if attracted by a power he could not master, he turned the handle of the door and went in.

(To be continued.)

RESULT OF POST-CARD COMPETITION.

No. 6.

THERE were seventeen words mis-spelt in *Short Stories* dated August 8th. No competitor sent in the complete list. Those who forwarded the greatest number first were Mr. J. Burton, 102, Glenpark Road, Forest Gate, E., and Mr. W. Cheetham, 1, Belmont Villa, Victoria Road, Romford, Essex, between whom one guinea has been divided; while the provincial guinea goes to Mr. John G. Usher, Baltinglass, co. Wicklow.

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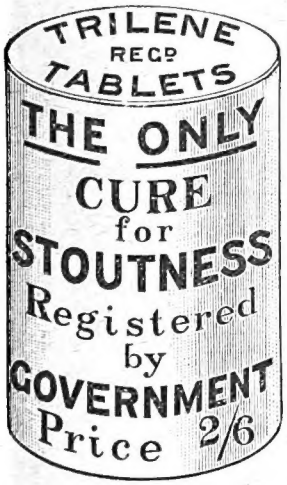

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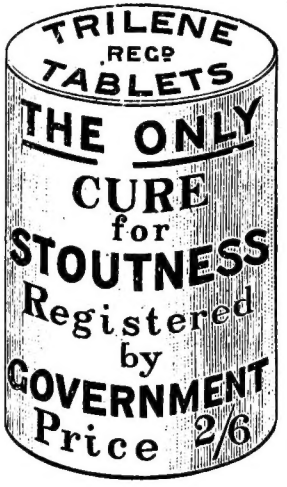

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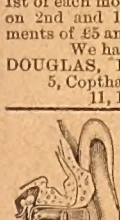

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